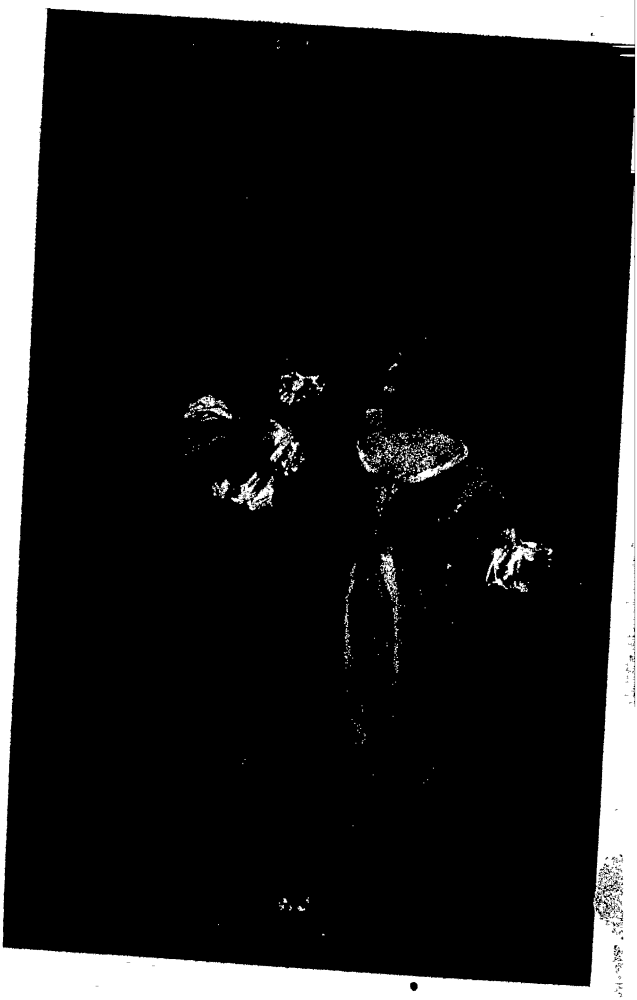
THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

VOL. IV.



"Oh, fly, fly! I implore you."

V. DE B. iv.

THE WAVERLEY DUMAS

THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

CONTAINING

TEN YEARS LATER

AND

THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

IN FIVE VOLUMES

VOL. IV

LONDON

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THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

CHAPTER I.

TRIUMFEMINATE.

On the king's arrival in Paris, he sat at the council which had been summoned, and worked for a certain portion of the day. The queen remained with the queen-mother, and burst into tears as soon as she had taken leave of the king. "Ah, madame!" she said, "the king no longer loves me! What will become of me?"

"A husband always loves his wife when she is like you," replied Anne of Austria.

"A time may come when he will love another woman instead of me."

"What do you call loving?"

"Always thinking of a person—always seeking her society."

"Do you happen to have remarked," said Anne of Austria, "that the king has ever done anything of the sort?"

"No, madame," said the young queen, hesitatingly.

"What is there to complain of, then, Marie?"

"You will admit that the king leaves me?"

"The king, my daughter, belongs to his people."

"And that is the very reason why he no longer belongs to me; and that is the reason, too, why I shall find myself, as so many queens before me, forsaken and forgotten,

whilst glory and honors will be reserved for others. Oh, my mother! the king is so handsome! how often will others tell him that they love him, and how much, indeed, they must do so!"

"It is very seldom, indeed, that women love the man in loving the king. But if such a thing happened, which I doubt, you would do better to wish, Marie, that such women should really love your husband. In the first place, the devoted love of a mistress is a rapid element of the dissolution of a lover's affection; and then, by dint of loving, the mistress loses all influence over her lover, whose power of wealth she does not covet, caring only for his affection. Wish, therefore, that the king should love but lightly, and that his mistress should love with all her heart."

"Oh, my mother, what power may not a deep affection exercise over him!"

"And yet you say you are resigned?"

"Quite true, quite true; I speak absurdly. There is a feeling of anguish, however, which I can never control."

"And that is?"

"The king may make a happy choice—may find a home, with all the tender influences of home, not far from that we can offer him,—a home with children round him, the children of another woman. Oh, madame! I should die if I were but to see the king's children."

"Marie, Marie," replied the queen-mother with a smile, and she took the young queen's hand in her own, "remember what I am going to say, and let it always be a consolation to you: the king cannot have a Dauphin without *you*."

With this remark the queen-mother quitted her daughter-in-law, in order to meet Madame, whose arrival in the grand cabinet had just been announced by one of

the pages. Madame had scarcely taken time to change her dress. Her face revealed her agitation, which betrayed a plan the execution of which occupied, while the result disturbed, her mind.

"I came to ascertain," she said, "if your majesties are suffering any fatigue from our journey."

"None at all," said the queen-mother.

"A little," replied Maria Theresa.

"I have suffered from annoyance more than anything else," said Madame.

"How was that?" inquired Anne of Austria.

"The fatigue the king undergoes in riding about on horseback."

"That does the king good."

"And it was I who advised him," said Maria Theresa, turning pale.

Madame said not a word in reply; but one of those smiles which were peculiarly her own flitted for a moment across her lips, without passing over the rest of her face; then, immediately changing the conversation, she continued, "We shall find Paris precisely the Paris we quitted; the same intrigues, plots, and flirtations going on."

"Intrigues! What intrigues do you allude to?" inquired the queen-mother.

"People are talking a good deal about M. Fouquet and Madame Plessis-Bellière."

"Who makes up the number to about ten thousand," replied the queen-mother. "But what are the plots you speak of?"

"We have, it seems, certain misunderstandings with Holland to settle."

"What about?"

"Monsieur has been telling me the story of the medals."

"Oh!" exclaimed the young queen, "you mean those medals struck in Holland, on which a cloud is seen pass-

ing across the sun, which is the king's device. You are wrong in calling that a plot—it is an insult."

"But so contemptible that the king can well despise it," replied the queen-mother. "Well, what are the flirtations which are alluded to? Do you mean that of Madame d'Olonne?"

"No, no; nearer ourselves than that."

"*Casa de usted*," murmured the queen-mother, and without moving her lips, in her daughter-in-law's ear, without being overheard by Madame, who thus continued:—"You know the terrible news?"

"Oh, yes; M. de Guiche's wound."

"And you attribute it, I suppose, as every one else does, to an accident which happened to him while hunting?"

"Yes, of course," said both the queens together, their interest awakened.

Madame drew closer to them, as she said, in a low tone of voice, "It was a duel."

"Ah!" said Anne of Austria, in a severe tone; for, in her ears, the word "duel," which had been forbidden in France all the time she reigned over it, had a strange sound.

"A most deplorable duel, which has nearly cost Monsieur two of his best friends, and the king two of his best servants."

"What was the cause of the duel?" inquired the young queen, animated by a secret instinct.

"Flirtation," repeated Madame, triumphantly. "The gentlemen in question were conversing about the virtue of a particular lady belonging to the court. One of them thought that Pallas was a very second-rate person compared to her; the other pretended that the lady in question was an imitation of Venus alluring Mars; and thereupon the two gentlemen fought as fiercely as Hector and Achilles."

"Venus alluring Mars?" said the young queen in a low tone of voice without venturing to examine into the allegory very deeply.

"Who is the lady?" inquired Anne of Austria abruptly. "You said, I believe, she was one of the ladies of honor?"

"Did I say so?" replied Madame.

"Yes; at least I thought I heard you mention it."

"Are you not aware that such a woman is of ill-omen to a royal house?"

"Is it not Mademoiselle de la Vallière?" said the queen-mother.

"Yes, indeed, that plain-looking creature."

"I thought she was affianced to a gentleman who certainly is not, at least so I have heard, either M. de Guiche or M. de Wardes?"

"Very possibly, Madame."

The young queen took up a piece of tapestry, and began to broider with an affectation of tranquillity her trembling fingers contradicted.

"What were you saying about Venus and Mars?" pursued the queen mother. "Is there a Mars also?"

"She boasts of that being the case."

"Did you say she boasts of it?"

"That was the cause of the duel."

"And M. de Guiche upheld the cause of Mars?"

"Yes, certainly; like the devoted servant he is."

"The devoted servant of whom?" exclaimed the young queen, forgetting her reserve in allowing her jealous feeling to escape.

"Mars, not to be defended except at the expense of Venus," replied Madame. "M. de Guiche maintained the perfect innocence of Mars, and no doubt affirmed that it was all a mere boast."

"And M. de Wardes," said Anne of Austria, quietly,

"spread the report that Venus was within her rights, I suppose?"

"Oh, De Wardes," thought Madame, "you shall pay dearly for the wound you have given that noblest—best of men!" And she began to attack De Wardes with the greatest bitterness; thus discharging her own and De Guiche's debt, with the assurance that she was working the future ruin of her enemy. She said so much, in fact, that had Manicamp been there, he would have regretted he had shown such firm regard for his friend, inasmuch as it resulted in the ruin of his unfortunate foe.

"I see nothing in the whole affair but *one* cause of mischief, and that is La Vallière herself," said the queen-mother.

The young queen resumed her work with perfect indifference of manner, while Madame listened eagerly.

"I do not yet quite understand what you said just now about the danger of coquetry," resumed Anne of Austria.

"It is quite true," Madame hastened to say, "that if the girl had not been a coquette, Mars would not have thought at all about her."

The repetition of this word Mars brought a passing color to the queen's face; but she still continued her work.

"I will not permit that, in my court, gentlemen should be set against each other in this manner," said Anne of Austria, calmly. "Such manners were useful enough, perhaps, in days when the divided nobility had no other rallying-point than mere gallantry. At that time women, whose sway was absolute and undivided, were privileged to encourage men's valor by frequent trials of their courage. But now, thank Heaven! there is but one master in France, and to him every instinct of the mind, every pulse of the body are due. I will not allow my son to be

deprived of any single one of his servants." And she turned towards the young queen, saying, "What is to be done with this La Vallière?"

"La Vallière?" said the queen, apparently surprised, "I do not even know the name;" and she accompanied this remark by one of those cold fixed smiles only to be observed on royal lips.

Madame was herself a princess great in every respect, great in intelligence, great by birth, by pride; the queen's reply, however, completely astonished her, and she was obliged to pause for a moment in order to recover herself. "She is one of my maids of honor," she replied, with a bow.

"In that case," retorted Maria Theresa, in the same tone, "it is your affair, my sister, and not ours."

"I beg your pardon," resumed Anne of Austria, "it is my affair. And I perfectly well understand," she pursued, addressing a look full of intelligence at Madame, "Madame's motive for saying what she has just said."

"Everything which emanates from you, madame," said the English princess, "proceeds from the lips of Wisdom."

"If we send this girl back again to her own family," said Maria Theresa, gently, "we must bestow a pension upon her."

"Which I will provide for out of my income," exclaimed Madame.

"No, no," interrupted Anne of Austria, "no disturbance, I beg. The king dislikes that the slightest disrespectful remark should be made of any lady. Let everything be done quietly. Will you have the kindness, madame, to send for this girl here; and you, my daughter, will have the goodness to retire to your own room."

The dowager queen's entreaties were commands, and as Maria Theresa rose to return to her apartments, Madame rose in order to send a page to summon La Vallière.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST QUARREL.

La Vallière entered the queen-mother's apartments without in the least suspecting that a serious plot was being concerted against her. She thought it was for something connected with her duties, and never had the queen-mother been unkind to her when such was the case. Besides, not being immediately under the control or direction of Anne of Austria, she could only have an official connection with her, to which her own gentleness of disposition, and the rank of the august princess, made her yield on every occasion with the best possible grace. She therefore advanced towards the queen-mother with that soft and gentle smile which constituted her principal charm, and as she did not approach sufficiently close, Anne of Austria signed to her to come nearer. Madame then entered the room, and with a perfectly calm air took her seat beside her mother-in-law, and continued the work which Maria Theresa had begun. When La Vallière, instead of the directions which she expected to receive immediately on entering the room, perceived these preparations, she looked with curiosity, if not with uneasiness, at the two princesses. Anne seemed full of thought, while Madame maintained an affectation of indifference that would have alarmed a less timid person even than Louise.

"Mademoiselle," said the queen-mother suddenly, without attempting to moderate or disguise her Spanish accent, which she never failed to do except when she was angry,

"come closer; we were talking of you, as every one else seems to be doing."

"Of me!" exclaimed La Vallière, turning pale.

"Do you pretend to be ignorant of it; are you not aware of the duel between M. de Guiche and M. de Wardes?"

"Oh, madame! I heard of it yesterday," said La Vallière, clasping her hands together.

"And did you not foresee this quarrel?"

"Why should I, madame?"

"Because two men never fight without a motive, and because you must be aware of the motive which awakened the animosity of the two in question."

"I am perfectly ignorant of it, madame."

"A persevering denial is a very commonplace mode of defense, and you, who have great pretensions to be witty and clever, ought to avoid commonplaces. What else have you to say?"

"Oh! Madame, your majesty terrifies me with your cold severity of manner; but I do not understand how I can have incurred your displeasure, or in what respect people concern themselves about me."

"Then I will tell you. M. De Guiche has been obliged to undertake your defense."

"My defense?"

"Yes. He is a gallant knight, and beautiful adventuresses like to see brave knights couch lances in their honor. But, for my part, I hate fields of battle, and, above all I hate adventures, and—take my remark as you please."

La Vallière sank at the queen's feet, who turned her back upon her. She stretched out her hands towards Madame, who laughed in her face. A feeling of pride made her rise to her feet.

"I have begged your majesty to tell me what is the

crime I am accused of—I can claim this at your hands; and I see I am condemned before I am even permitted to justify myself."

"Eh! indeed," cried Anne of Austria, "listen to her beautiful phrases, Madame, and to her fine sentiments; she is an inexhaustible well of tenderness and heroic expressions. One can easily see, young lady, that you have cultivated your mind in the society of crowned heads."

La Vallière felt struck to the heart; she became, not whiter, but as white as a lily, and all her strength forsook her.

"I wished to inform you," interrupted the queen disdainfully, "that if you continue to nourish such feelings, you will humiliate us to such a degree that we shall be ashamed of appearing before you. Be simple in your manners. By the by, I am informed that you are affianced; is it the case?"

La Vallière pressed her hand over her heart, which was wrung with a fresh pang.

"Answer when you are spoken to!"

"Yes, madame."

"To a gentleman?"

"Yes, madame."

"His name?"

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"Are you aware that it is an exceedingly fortunate circumstance for you, mademoiselle, that such is the case, and without fortune or position, as you are, or without any very great personal advantages, you ought to bless Heaven for having procured you such a future as seems to be in store for you."

La Vallière did not reply. "Where is this Vicomte de Bragelonne?" pursued the queen.

"In England," said Madame, "where the report of this young lady's success will not fail to reach him."

"Oh, Heaven!" murmured La Vallière in despair.

"Very well, mademoiselle!" said Anne of Austria, "we will get this young gentleman to return, and send you away somewhere with him. If you are of a different opinion—for girls have strange views and fancies at times, trust to me, I will put you in a proper path again. I have done as much for girls who are not as good as you are, probably."

La Vallière ceased to hear the queen, who pitilessly added: "I will send you somewhere, by yourself, where you will be able to indulge in a little serious reflection. Reflection calms the ardor of the blood, and swallows up the illusions of youth. I suppose you understand what I have been saying?"

"Madame!"

"Not a word!"

"I am innocent of everything your majesty supposes. Oh, madame! you are a witness of my despair. I love, I respect your majesty so much."

"It would be far better not to respect me at all," said the queen, with a chilling irony of manner. "It would be far better if you were not innocent. Do you presume to suppose that I should be satisfied simply to leave you unpunished if you had committed the fault?"

"Oh, madame! you are killing me."

"No acting, if you please, or I will precipitate the *dénouement* of this *play;* leave the room; return to your own apartment and I trust my lesson may be of service to you."

"Madame!" said La Vallière to the Duchess d'Orleans, whose hands she seized in her own, "do you, who are so good, intercede for me."

"I!" replied the latter, with an insulting joy, "I—good! —Ah, mademoiselle, you think nothing of the kind;" and with a rude, hasty gesture she repulsed the young girl's grasp.

La Vallière, instead of giving way, as from her extreme pallor and her tears the two princesses possibly expected, suddenly resumed her calm and dignified air; she bowed profoundly, and left the room.

"Well!" said Anne of Austria to Madame, "do you think she will begin again?"

"I always suspect those gentle, patient characters," replied Madame. "Nothing is more full of courage than a patient heart, nothing more self-reliant than a gentle spirit."

"I feel I may almost venture to assure you she will think twice before she looks at the god Mars again."

"So long as she does not obtain the protection of his buckler I do not care," retorted Madame.

A proud, defiant look of the queen-mother was the reply to this objection, which was by no means deficient in *finesse;* and both of them, almost sure of their victory, went to look for Maria Theresa, who had been waiting for them with impatience.

It was about half-past six in the evening, and the king had just partaken of refreshment. He lost no time; but the repast finished, and business matters settled, he took Saint-Aignan by the arm, and desired him to lead the way to La Vallière's apartments. The courtier uttered an exclamation.

"Well, what is that for? It is a habit you will have to adopt, and in order to adopt a habit, one must make a beginning."

"Oh, sire!" said Saint-Aignan, "it is hardly possible: for every one can be seen entering or leaving those apartments. If, however, some pretext or other were made use of—if your majesty, for instance, would wait until Madame were in her own apartments——"

"No pretext; no delays. I have had enough of these impediments and mysteries; I cannot perceive in what

respect the king of France dishonors himself by conversing with an amiable and clever girl. Evil be to him who evil thinks."

"Will your majesty forgive an excess of zeal on my part?"

"Speak freely."

"How about the queen?"

"True, true; I always wish the most entire respect to be shown to her majesty. Well, then, this evening only will I pay Mademoiselle de la Vallière a visit, and after to-day I will make use of any pretext you like. To-morrow we will devise all sorts of means; to-night I have no time."

Saint-Aignan made no reply; he descended the steps, preceding the king, and crossed the different courtyards with a feeling of shame, which the distinguished honor of accompanying the king did not remove. The reason was that Saint-Aignan wished to stand well with Madame, as well as with the queens, and also, that he did not, on the other hand, wish to displease Mademoiselle de la Vallière: and in order to carry out so many promising affairs, it was difficult to avoid jostling against some obstacle or other. Besides, the windows of the young queen's rooms, those of the queen-mother's, and of Madame herself, looked out upon the courtyard of the maids of honor. To be seen, therefore, accompanying the king, would be effectually to quarrel with three great and influential princesses—whose authority was unbounded—for the purpose of supporting the ephemeral credit of a mistress. The unhappy Saint-Aignan, who had not displayed a very great amount of courage in taking La Vallière's part in the park of Fontainebleau, did not feel any braver in the broad day-light, and found a thousand defects in the poor girl which he was most eager to communicate to the king. But his trial soon finished,—the courtyards were crossed; not a curtain

was drawn aside, nor a window opened. The king walked hastily, because of his impatience, and the long legs of Saint-Aignan, who preceded him. At the door, however, Saint-Aignan wished to retire, but the king desired him to remain; a delicate consideration, on the king's part, which the courtier could very well have dispensed with. He had to follow Louis into La Vallière's apartment. As soon as the king arrived the young girl dried her tears: but so precipitately that the king perceived it. He questioned her most anxiously and tenderly, and pressed her to tell him the cause of her emotion.

"Nothing is the matter, sire," she said.

"And yet you were weeping?"

"Oh no, indeed, sire."

"Look, Saint-Aignan, and tell me if I am mistaken."

Saint-Aignan ought to have answered, but he was too much embarrassed.

"At all events your eyes are red, mademoiselle," said the king.

"The dust of the road merely, sire."

"No, no; you no longer possess that air of supreme contentment which renders you so beautiful and so attractive. You do not look at me. Why avoid my gaze?" he said, as she turned aside her head. "In Heaven's name, what is the matter?" he inquired, beginning to lose command over himself.

"Nothing at all, sire; and I am perfectly ready to assure your majesty that my mind is as free from anxiety as you could possibly wish."

"Your mind at ease, when I see you are embarrassed at the slightest thing. Has any one annoyed you?"

"No, no, sire."

"I insist upon knowing if such really be the case," said the prince, his eyes sparkling.

"No one, sire, no one has in any way offended me."

"In that case, pray resume your gentle air of gayety, or that sweet melancholy look which I so loved in you this morning; for pity's sake, do so."

"Yes, sire, yes."

The king tapped the floor impatiently with his foot, saying, "Such a change is positively inexplicable." And he looked at Saint-Aignan, who had also remarked La Vallière's peculiar lethargy, as well as the king's impatience.

It was futile for the king to entreat, and as useless for him to try to overcome her depression: the poor girl was completely overwhelmed,—the appearance of an angel would hardly have awakened her from her torpor.

The king saw in her repeated negative replies, a mystery full of unkindness; he began to look round the apartment with a suspicious air. There happened to be in La Vallière's room a miniature of Athos. The king remarked that this portrait bore a strong resemblance to Bragelonne, for it had been taken when the count was quite a young man. He looked at it with a threatening air. La Vallière, in her misery far indeed from thinking of this portrait, could not conjecture the cause of the king's preoccupation. And yet the king's mind was occupied with a terrible remembrance, which had more than once taken possession of his mind, but which he had always driven away. He recalled the intimacy existing between the two young people from their birth, their engagement, and that Athos had himself come to solicit La Vallière's hand for Raoul. He therefore could not but suppose that on her return to Paris, La Vallière had found news from London awaiting her, and that this news had counterbalanced the influence he had been enabled to exert over her. He immediately felt himself stung, as it were, by feelings of the wildest jealousy; and again questioned her, with increased bitterness. La Vallière could not reply,

unless she were to acknowledge everything, which would be to accuse the queen, and Madame also; and the consequence would be, that she would have to enter into an open warfare with these two great and powerful princesses. She thought within herself that as she made no attempt to conceal from the king what was passing in her own mind, the king ought to be able to read in her heart, in spite of her silence; and that, had he really loved her, he would have understood and guessed everything. What was sympathy, then, if not that divine flame which possesses the property of enlightening the heart, and of saving lovers the necessity of an expression of their thoughts and feelings. She maintained her silence, therefore, sighing, and concealing her face in her hands. These sighs and tears, which had at first distressed, then terrified Louis XIV., now irritated him. He could not bear opposition,—the opposition which tears and sighs exhibited, any more than opposition of any other kind. His remarks, therefore, became bitter, urgent, and openly aggressive in their nature. This was a fresh cause of distress for the poor girl. From that very circumstance, therefore, which she regarded as an injustice on her lover's part, she drew sufficient courage to bear, not only her other troubles, but this one also.

The king next began to accuse her in direct terms. La Vallière did not even attempt to defend herself; she endured all his accusations without according any other reply than that of shaking her head; without any other remark than that which escapes the heart in deep distress—a prayerful appeal to Heaven for help. But this ejaculation, instead of calming the king's displeasure, rather increased it. He, moreover saw himself seconded by Saint-Aignan, for Saint-Aignan, as we have observed, having seen the storm increasing, and not knowing the extent of the regard of which Louis XIV. was capable,

felt, by anticipation, all the collected wrath of the three princesses, and the near approach of poor La Vallière's downfall, and he was not true knight enough to resist the fear that he himself might be dragged down in the impending ruin. Saint-Aignan did not reply to the king's questions except by short, dry remarks, pronounced half-aloud; and by abrupt gestures, whose object was to make things worse, and bring about a misunderstanding, the result of which would be to free him from the annoyance of having to cross the courtyards in open day, in order to follow his illustrious companion to La Vallière's apartments. In the meantime the king's anger momentarily increased; he made two or three steps towards the door as if to leave the room, but returned. The young girl did not, however, raise her head, although the sound of his footsteps might have warned her that her lover was leaving her. He drew himself up, for a moment, before her, with his arms crossed.

"For the last time, mademoiselle," he said, "will you speak? Will you assign a reason for this change, this fickleness, for this caprice?"

"What can I say?" murmured La Vallière. "Do you not see, sire, that I am completely overwhelmed at this moment; that I have no power of will, or thought, or speech?"

"Is it so difficult, then, to speak the truth? You could have told me the whole truth in fewer words than those in which you have expressed yourself."

"But the truth about what, sire?"

"About everything."

La Vallière was just on the point of revealing the truth to the king, her arms made a sudden movement as if they were about to open, but her lips remained silent, and her hands again fell listlessly by her side. The poor girl had not yet endured sufficient unhappiness to risk the necessary revelation. "I know nothing," she stammered out.

"Oh!" exclaimed the king, "this is no longer mere coquetry, or caprice, it is treason."

And this time nothing could restrain him. The impulse of his heart was not sufficient to induce him to turn back, and he darted out of the room with a gesture full of despair. Saint-Aignan followed him, wishing for nothing better than to quit the place.

Louis XIV. did not pause until he reached the staircase, and grasping the balustrade, said: "You see how shamefully I have been duped."

"How, sire?" inquired the favorite.

"De Guiche fought on the Vicomte de Bragelonne's account, and this Bragelonne. . . oh! Saint-Aignan, she still loves him. I vow to you, Saint-Aignan, that if, in three days from now, there were to remain but an atom of affection for her in my heart, I should die from very shame." And the king resumed his way to his own apartments.

"I told your majesty how it would be," murmured Saint Aignan, continuing to follow the king, and timidly glancing up at the different windows.

Unfortunately their return was not, like their arrival, unobserved. A curtain was suddenly drawn aside; Madame was behind it. She had seen the king leave the apartments of the maids of honor, and as soon as she observed that his majesty had passed, she left her own apartments with hurried steps, and ran up the staircase that led to the room the king had just left.

CHAPTER III.

DESPAIR.

As soon as the king was gone La Vallière raised herself from the ground, and stretched out her arms, as if to follow and detain him, but when, having violently closed the door, the sound of his retreating footsteps could be heard in the distance, she had hardly sufficient strength left to totter towards and fall at the foot of her crucifix. There she remained, broken-hearted, absorbed, and overwhelmed by her grief, forgetful of and indifferent to everything but her profound sorrow;—a grief she only vaguely realized—as though by instinct. In the midst of this wild tumult of thoughts La Vallière heard her door open again; she started, and turned round, thinking it was the king who had returned. She was deceived, however, for it was Madame who appeared at the door. What did she now care for Madame! Again she sank down, her head supported by her *prie-dieu* chair. It was Madame, agitated, angry, and threatening. But what was that to her? "Mademoiselle," said the princess, standing before La Vallière, "this is very fine, I admit, to kneel, and pray, and make a pretense of being religious; but however submissive you may be in your addresses to Heaven, it is desirable that you should pay some little attention to the wishes of those who reign and rule here below."

La Vallière raised her head painfully in token of respect.

"Not long since," continued Madame, "a certain recommendation was addressed to you, I believe."

La Vallière's fixed and wild gaze showed how complete her forgetfulness or ignorance was.

"The queen recommended you," continued Madame, "to conduct yourself in such a manner that no one could be justified in spreading any reports about you."

La Vallière darted an inquiring look towards her.

"I will not," continued Madame, "allow my household, which is that of the first princess of the blood, to set an evil example to the court; you would be the cause of such an example. I beg you to understand, therefore, in the absence of any witness of your shame—for I do not wish to humiliate you—that you are from this moment at perfect liberty to leave, and that you can return to your mother at Blois."

La Vallière could not sink lower, nor could she suffer more than she had already suffered. Her countenance did not even change, but she remained kneeling with her hands clasped, like the figure of the Magdalen.

"Did you hear me?" said Madame.

A shiver which passed through her whole frame, was La Vallière's only reply. And as the victim gave no other signs of life, Madame left the room. And then, her very respiration suspended, and her blood almost congealed, as it were, in her veins, La Vallière by degrees felt that the pulsation of her wrists, her neck, and temples, began to throb more and more painfully. These pulsations as they gradually increased, soon changed into a species of brain fever, and in her temporary delirium she saw the figures of her friends contending with her enemies, floating before her vision. She heard, too, mingled together in her deafened ears, words of menace and words of fond affection; she seemed raised out of her existence as though it were upon the wings of a mighty tempest, and in the dim horizon of the path along which her delirium hurried her, she saw the stone which covered her tomb upraised,

and the grim, appalling texture of eternal night revealed to her distracted gaze. But the horror of the dream which possessed her senses faded away, and she was again restored to the habitual resignation of her character. A ray of hope penetrated her heart, as a ray of sunlight streams into the dungeon of some unhappy captive. Her mind reverted to the journey from Fontainebleau, she saw the king riding beside her carriage, telling her that he loved her, asking for her love in return, requiring her to swear, and himself swearing too, that never should an evening pass by, if ever a misunderstanding were to arise between them, without a visit, a letter, a sign of some kind, being sent, to replace the troubled anxiety of the evening with the calm repose of the night. It was the king who had suggested that, who had imposed a promise on her, and who had sworn to it himself. It was impossible, therefore, she reasoned, that the king should fail in keeping the promise which he had himself exacted from her, unless, indeed, Louis was a despot who enforced love as he enforced obedience; unless, too, the king were so indifferent that the first obstacle in his way was sufficient to arrest his further progress. The king, that kind protector, who by a word, a single word, could relieve her distress of mind, the king even joined her persecutors. Oh! his anger could not possibly last. Now that he was alone, he would be suffering all that she herself was a prey to. But he was not tied hand and foot as she was; he could act, could move about, could come to her, while she could do nothing but wait. And the poor girl waited and waited, with breathless anxiety—for she could not believe it possible that the king would not come.

It was now about half-past ten. He would either come to her, or write to her, or send some kind word by M. de Saint-Aignan. If he were to come, oh! how she would

fly to meet him; how she would thrust aside that excess of delicacy which she now discovered was misunderstood; how eagerly she would explain: "It is not I who do not love you—it is the fault of others who will not allow me to love you." And then it must be confessed that she reflected upon it, and also the more she reflected, Louis appeared to her to be less guilty. In fact, he was ignorant of everything. What must he have thought of the obstinacy with which she remained silent. Impatient and irritable as the king was known to be, it was extraordinary that he had been able to preserve his temper so long. And yet, had it been her own case, she undoubtedly would not have acted in such a manner; she would have understood—have guessed everything. Yes, but she was nothing but a poor simple-minded girl, and not a great and powerful monarch. Oh! if he would but come, if he would but come!—how eagerly she would forgive him for all he had just made her suffer! how much more tenderly she would love him because she had so cruelly suffered! And so she sat, with her head bent forward in eager expectation towards the door, her lips slightly parted, as if—and Heaven forgive her for the mental exclamation!—they were awaiting the kiss which the king's lips had in the morning so sweetly indicated, when he pronounced the word *love!* If the king did not come, at least he would write; it was a second chance; a chance less delightful certainly than the other, but which would show an affection just as strong, only more timid in its nature. Oh! how she would devour his letter, how eager she would be to answer it! and when the messenger who had brought it had left her, how she would kiss it, read it over and over again, press to her heart the lucky paper which would have brought her ease of mind, tranquillity, and perfect happiness. At all events, if the king did not come; if the king did not write, he could

not do otherwise than send Saint-Aignan, or Saint-Aignan could not do otherwise than come of his own accord. Even if it were a third person, how openly she would speak to him ; the royal presence would not be there to freeze her words upon her tongue, and then no suspicious feeling would remain a moment longer in the king's heart.

Everything with La Vallière, heart and look, body and mind, was concentrated in eager expectation. She said to herself that there was an hour left in which to indulge hope; that until midnight struck, the king might come, or write, or send; that at midnight only would every expectation vanish, every hope be lost. Whenever she heard any stir in the palace, the poor girl fancied she was the cause of it; whenever she heard any one pass in the courtyard below she imagined they were messengers of the king coming to her. Eleven o'clock struck, then a quarter-past eleven; then half-past. The minutes dragged slowly on in this anxiety, and yet they seemed to pass too quickly. And now, it struck a quarter to twelve. Midnight, midnight was near, the last, the final hope that remained. With the last stroke of the clock, the last ray of light seemed to fade away; and with the last ray faded her final hope. And so, the king himself had deceived her; it was he who had been the first to fail in keeping the oath which he had sworn that very day; twelve hours only between his oath and his perjured vow; it was not long, alas! to have preserved the illusion. And so, not only did the king not love her, but he despised her whom every one ill-treated; he despised her to the extent even of abandoning her to the shame of an expulsion which was equivalent to having an ignominious sentence passed upon her; and yet, it was he, the king himself, who was the first cause of this ignominy. A bitter smile, the only symptom of anger which during this long conflict had passed across the angelic face, appeared upon her lips.

What, in fact, now remained on earth for her, after the king was lost to her? Nothing. But Heaven still remained, and her thoughts flew thither. She prayed that the proper course for her to follow might be suggested. "It is from Heaven," she thought, "that I expect everything; it is from Heaven I ought to expect everything." And she looked at her crucifix with a devotion full of tender love. "There," she said, "hangs before me a Master who never forgets and never abandons those who neither forget nor abandon Him; it is to him alone that we must sacrifice ourselves." And, thereupon, could any one have gazed into the recesses of that chamber, they would have seen the poor despairing girl adopt a final resolution, and determine upon one last plan in her mind. Then, as her knees were no longer able to support her, she gradually sank down upon the *prie-dieu*, and with her head pressed against the wooden cross, her eyes fixed, and her respiration short and quick, she watched for the earliest rays of approaching daylight. At two o'clock in the morning she was still in the same bewilderment of mind, or rather the same ecstasy of feeling. Her thoughts had almost ceased to hold communion with things of the world. And when she saw the pale violet tints of early dawn visible over the roofs of the palace, and vaguely revealing the outlines of the ivory crucifix which she held embraced, she rose from the ground with a new-born strength, kissed the feet of the divine martyr, descended the staircase leading from the room, and wrapped herself from head to foot in a mantle as she went along. She reached the wicket at the very moment the guard of musketeers opened the gate to admit the first relief-guard belonging to one of the Swiss regiments. And then, gliding behind the soldiers, she reached the street before the officer in command of the patrol had even thought of asking who the young girl was who was making her escape from the palace at so early an hour.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FLIGHT.

La Valliere followed the patrol as it left the courtyard. The patrol bent its steps towards the right, by the Rue St. Honoré, and mechanically La Vallière turned to the left. Her resolution was taken—her determination fixed; she wished to betake herself to the convent of the Carmelites at Chaillot, the superior of which enjoyed a reputation for severity which made the worldly-minded people of the court tremble. La Vallière had never seen Paris, she had never gone out on foot, and so, would have been unable to find her way even had she been in a calmer frame of mind than was then the case; and this may explain why she ascended instead of descending, the Rue St. Honoré. Her only thought was to get away from the Palais-Royal, and this she was doing; she had heard it said that Chaillot looked out upon the Seine, and she accordingly directed her steps towards the Seine. She took the Rue de Coq, and not being able to cross the Louvre, bore towards the church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, proceeding along the site of the colonnade which was subsequently built there by Perrault. In a very short time she reached the quays. Her steps were rapid and agitated; she scarcely felt the weakness which reminded her of having sprained her foot when very young, and which obliged her to limp slightly. At any other hour in the day her countenance would have awakened the suspicions of the least clear-sighted, attracted the attention of the most indifferent. But at half-past two in the

morning, the streets of Paris are almost, if not quite, deserted, and scarcely any one is to be seen but the hard-working artisan on his way to earn his daily bread, or the roistering idlers of the streets, who are returning to their homes after a night of riot and debauchery; for the former the day was beginning, for the latter it was just closing. La Vallière was afraid of both faces, in which her ignorance of Parisian types did not permit her to distinguish the type of probity from that of dishonesty. The appearance of misery alarmed her, and all she met seemed either vile or miserable. Her dress, which was the same she had worn during the previous evening, was elegant even in its careless disorder; for it was the one in which she had presented herself to the queen-mother; and, moreover, when she drew aside the mantle which covered her face, in order to enable her to see the way she was going, her pallor and her beautiful eyes spoke an unknown language to the men she met, and, unconsciously, the poor fugitive seemed to invite the brutal remarks of the one class, or to appeal to the compassion of the other. La Vallière still walked on in the same way, breathless and hurried, until she reached the top of the Place de Grève. She stopped from time to time, placed her hand upon her heart, leaned against a wall until she could breathe freely again, and then continued her course more rapidly than before. On reaching the Place de Grève La Vallière suddenly came upon a group of three drunken men, reeling and staggering along, who were just leaving a boat, which they had made fast to the quay; the boat was freighted with wines, and it was apparent that they had done ample justice to the merchandise. They were celebrating their convivial exploits in three different keys, when suddenly, as they reached the end of the railing leading down to the quay, they found an obstacle in their path in the shape of this young girl. La Valliè-



"OH, M. D'ARTAGNAN! YOU WILL PROTECT ME

stopped; while they, on their part, at the appearance of the young girl dressed in court costume, also halted, and, seizing each other by the hand, they surrounded La Vallière, singing,—

"Oh! all ye weary wights, who mope alone,
Come drink, and sing and laugh, round Venus' throne."

La Vallière at once understood that the men were insulting her, and wished to prevent her passing; she tried to do so several times, but her efforts were useless. Her limbs failed her; she felt she was on the point of falling, and uttered a cry of terror. At the same moment the circle which surrounded her was suddenly broken through in a most violent manner. One of her insulters was knocked to the left, another fell rolling over and over to the right, close to the water's edge, while the third could hardly keep his feet. An officer of the musketeers stood face to face with the young girl, with threatening brow and hand raised to carry out his threat. The drunken fellows at sight of the uniform made their escape with what speed their staggering limbs could lend them, all the more eagerly for the proof of strength which the wearer of the uniform had just afforded them.

"Is it possible," exclaimed the musketeer, "that it can be Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

La Vallière, bewildered by what had just happened, and confounded by hearing her name pronounced, looked up and recognized D'Artagnan. "Oh, M. d'Artagnan! it is indeed I;" and at the same moment she seized his arm. "You will protect me, will you not?" she added, in a tone of entreaty.

"Most certainly I will protect you; but, in Heaven's name, where are you going at this hour?"

"I am going to Chaillot."

"You are going to Chaillot by way of La Ranée!

why, mademoiselle, you are turning your back upon it."

"In that case, monsieur, be kind enough to put me in the right way, and to go with me a short distance."

"Most willingly."

"But how does it happen that I have found you here? By what merciful intervention were you sent to my assistance? I almost seem to be dreaming, or to be losing my senses."

"I happened to be here, mademoiselle, because I have a house in the Place de Grève, at the sign of the Notre-Dame, the rent of which I went to receive yesterday, and where I, in fact, passed the night. And I also wished to be at the palace early, for the purpose of inspecting my posts."

"Thank you," said La Vallière.

"That is what *I* was doing," said D'Artagnan to himself; "but what is *she* doing, and why is she going to Chaillot at such an hour?" And he offered her his arm, which she took, and began to walk with increased precipitation, which ill concealed, however, her weakness. D'Artagnan perceived it, and proposed to La Vallière that she should take a little rest, which she refused.

"You are ignorant, perhaps, where Chaillot is?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Quite so."

"It is a great distance."

"That matters very little."

"It is at least a league."

"I can walk it."

D'Artagnan did not reply; he could tell, merely by the tone of a voice, when a resolution was real or not. He rather bore along than accompanied La Vallière, until they perceived the elevated ground of Chaillot.

"What house are you going to, mademoiselle?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"To the Carmelites, monsieur."

"To the Carmelites?" repeated D'Artagnan, in amazement.

"Yes; and since Heaven has directed you towards me to give me your support on my road, accept both my thanks and my adieux."

"To the Carmelites! Your adieux! Are you going to become a nun?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Yes, monsieur."

"What, you! ! !" There was in this "you," which we have marked by three notes of exclamation in order to render it as expressive as possible,—there was, we repeat, in this "you" a complete poem; it recalled to La Vallière her old recollections of Blois, and her new recollections of Fontainebleau; it said to her, "*You*, who might be happy with Raoul: *you*, who might be powerful with Louis; *you* about to become a nun!"

"Yes, monsieur," she said, "I am going to devote myself to the service of Heaven; and to renounce the world entirely."

"But are you not mistaken with regard to your vocation,—are you not mistaken in supposing it to be the will of Heaven?"

"No, since Heaven has been pleased to throw you in my way. Had it not been for you, I should certainly have sunk from fatigue on the road, and since Heaven, I repeat, has thrown you in my way, it is because it has willed that I should carry out my intention."

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, doubtingly, "that is a rather subtle distinction, I think."

"Whatever it may be," returned the young girl, "I have acquainted you with the steps I have taken, and with my fixed resolution. And, now, I have one last favor to ask of you, even while I return you my thanks. The king is entirely ignorant of my flight from the Palais-

Royal, and is ignorant also of what I am about to do."

"The king ignorant, you say!" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "Take care, mademoiselle; you are not aware of what you are doing. No one ought to do anything with which the king is unacquainted, especially those who belong to the court."

"I no longer belong to the court, monsieur."

D'Artagnan looked at the young girl with increasing astonishment.

"Do not be uneasy, monsieur," she continued: "I have well calculated everything; and were it not so, it would now be too late to reconsider my resolution,—all is decided."

"Well, mademoiselle, what do you wish me to do?"

"In the name of that sympathy which misfortune inspires, by your generous feeling, and by your honor as a gentlemen, I entreat you to promise me one thing."

"Name it."

"Swear to me, Monsieur D'Artagnan, that you will not tell the king that you have seen me, and that I am at the Carmelites."

"I will not swear that," said D'Artagnan, shaking his head.

"Why?"

"Because I know the king, I know you, I know myself even, nay, the whole human race, too well: no, no, I will not swear that!"

"In that case," cried Vallière, with an energy of which one would hardly have thought her capable, "instead of the blessing which I should have implored for you until my dying day, I will invoke a curse, for you are rendering me the most miserable creature that ever lived."

We have already observed that D'Artagnan could easily recognize the accents of truth and sincerity, and he could not resist this last appeal. He saw by her face how bit-

terly she suffered from a feeling of degradation, he remarked her trembling limbs, how her whole slight and delicate frame was violently agitated by some internal struggle, and clearly perceived that resistance might be fatal. "I will do as you wish, then," he said. "Be satisfied, mademoiselle, I will say nothing to the king."

"Oh! thanks, thanks," exclaimed La Vallière, "you are the most generous man breathing."

And in her extreme delight she seized hold of D'Artagnan's hands and pressed them between her own. D'Artagnan, who felt himself quite overcome, said: "This is touching, upon my word; she begins where others leave off."

And La Vallière, who, in the bitterness of her distress, had sunk upon the ground, rose and walked towards the convent of the Carmelites, which could now, in the dawning light, be perceived just before them. D'Artagnan followed her at a distance. The entrance-door was half-open; she glided in like a shadow, and thanking D'Artagnan by a parting gesture, disappeared from his sight. When D'Artagnan found himself quite alone, he reflected profoundly upon what had just taken place. "Upon my word," he said, "this looks very much like what is called a false position. To keep such a secret as that, is to keep a burning coal in one's breeches-pocket, and trust that it may not burn the stuff. And yet, not to keep it when I have sworn to do so, is dishonorable. It generally happens that some bright idea or other occurs to me as I am going along; but I am very much mistaken if I shall not, now, have to go a long way in order to find the solution of this affair. Yes, but which way to go? Oh! towards Paris, of course; that is the best way, after all. Only one must make haste, and in order to make haste four legs are better than two, and I, unhappily, have only two. 'A horse, a horse,' as I heard them say at the theater in

London, 'my kingdom for a horse!' And now I think of it, it need not cost me so much as that, for at the Barrière de la Conference there is a guard of musketeers, and instead of the one horse I need, I shall find ten there."

So, in pursuance of this resolution, which he adopted with his usual rapidity, D'Artagnan immediately turned his back upon the heights of Chaillot, reached the guard-house, took the fastest horse he could find there, and was at the palace in less than ten minutes. It was striking five as he reached the Palais-Royal. The king, he was told, had gone to bed at his usual hour, having been long engaged with M. Colbert, and, in all probability, was still sound asleep. "Come," said D'Artagnan, "she spoke the truth; the king is ignorant of everything; if he only knew one-half of what has happened, the Palais-Royal by this time would be turned upside down."

CHAPTER V.

SHOWING HOW LOUIS, ON HIS PART, HAD PASSED THE TIME FROM TEN TO HALF-PAST TWELVE AT NIGHT.

When the king left the apartment of the maids of honor, he found Colbert awaiting him to take directions for the next day's ceremony, as the king was then to receive the Dutch and Spanish ambassadors. Louis XIV. had serious causes of dissatisfaction with the Dutch; the States had already been guilty of many mean shifts and evasions with France, and without perceiving or without caring about the chances of a rupture, they again abandoned the alliance with his Most Christian Majesty, for the

purpose of entering into all kinds of plots with Spain. Louis XIV. at his accession, that is to say, at the death of Cardinal Mazarin, had found this political question roughly sketched out; the solution was difficult for a young man, but as, at that time, the king represented the whole nation, anything that the head resolved upon, the body would be found ready to carry out. Any sudden impulse of anger, the reaction of young hot blood upon the brain, would be quite sufficient to change an old form of policy and create another system altogether. The part that diplomatists had to play in those days was that of arranging among themselves the different *coups-d'état* which their sovereign masters might wish to effect. Louis was not in that calm frame of mind which was necessary to enable him to determine on a wise course of policy. Still much agitated from the quarrel he had just had with La Vallière, he walked hastily into his cabinet, dimly desirous of finding an opportunity of producing an explosion after he had controlled himself for so long a time. Colbert, as he saw the king enter, knew the position of affairs at a glance, understood the king's intentions, and resolved therefore to maneuver a little. When Louis requested to be informed what it would be necessary to say on the morrow, Colbert began by expressing his surprise that his majesty had not been properly informed by M. Fouquet. "M. Fouquet," he said, "is perfectly acquainted with the whole of this Dutch affair—he receives the dispatches himself direct."

The king, who was accustomed to hear M. Colbert speak in not over-scrupulous terms of M. Fouquet, allowed this remark to pass unanswered, and merely listened. Colbert noticed the effect it had produced, and hastened to back out, saying that M. Fouquet was not on all occasions as blamable as at the first glance might seem to be the case, inasmuch as at that moment he was

greatly occupied. The king looked up. "What do you allude to?" he said.

"Sire, men are but men, and M. Fouquet has his defects as well as his great qualities."

"Ah! defects, who is without them, M. Colbert?"

"Your majesty, hardly," said Colbert, boldly; for he knew how to convey a good deal of flattery in a light amount of blame, like the arrow which cleaves the air notwithstanding its weight, thanks to the light feathers which bear it up.

The king smiled. "What defect has M. Fouquet, then?" he said.

"Still the same, sire; it is said he is in love."

"In love! with whom?"

"I am not quite sure, sire; I have very little to do with matters of gallantry."

"At all events you know, since you speak of it."

"I have heard a name mentioned."

"Whose?"

"I cannot now remember whose, but I think it is one of Madame's maids of honor."

The king started. "You know more than you like to say, M. Colbert," he murmured.

"I assure you, no, sire."

"At all events, Madame's maids of honor are all known, and in mentioning their names to you, you will perhaps recollect the one you allude to."

"No, sire."

"At least, try."

"It would be useless, sire. Whenever the name of any lady who runs the risk of being compromised is concerned, my memory is like a coffer of bronze, the key of which I have lost."

A dark cloud seemed to pass over the mind as well as across the face of the king; then, wishing to appear as if

he were perfect master of himself and his feelings, he said, "And now for the affair concerning Holland."

"In the first place, sire, at what hour will your majesty receive the ambassadors?"

"Early in the morning."

"Eleven o'clock?"

"That is too late—say nine o'clock."

"That will be too early, sire."

"For friends, that would be a matter of no importance; one does what one likes with one's friends; but for one's enemies, in that case nothing could be better than if they *were* to feel hurt. I should not be sorry, I confess, to have to finish altogether with these marsh-birds, who annoy me with their cries."

"It shall be precisely as your majesty desires. At nine o'clock, therefore—I will give the necessary orders. Is it to be a formal audience?"

"No. I wish to have an explanation with them, and not to embitter matters, as is always the case when many persons are present, but, at the same time, I wish to clear up everything with them, in order not to have to begin over again."

"Your majesty will inform me of the persons whom you wish to be present at the reception."

"I will draw out a list. Let us speak of the ambassadors; what do they want?"

"Allies with Spain, they gain nothing; allies with France, they lose much."

"How is that?"

"Allied with Spain, they see themselves bounded and protected by the possessions of their allies; they cannot touch them, however anxious they may be to do so. From Antwerp to Rotterdam is but a step, and that by the way of the Scheldt and the Meuse. If they wish to make a bite at the Spanish cake, you, sire, the son-in-law

of the king of Spain, could with your cavalry sweep the earth from your dominions to Brussels in a couple of days. Their design is, therefore, only to quarrel so far with you, and only to make you suspect Spain so far, as will be sufficient to induce you not to interfere with their own affairs."

"It would be far more simple, I should imagine," replied the king, "to form a solid alliance with me, by means of which I should gain something, while they would gain everything."

"Not so; for if, by chance, they were to have you, or France rather, as a boundary, your majesty is not an agreeable neighbor. Young, ardent, warlike, the king of France might inflict some serious mischief on Holland, especially if he were to get near her."

"I perfectly understand, M. Colbert, and you have explained it very clearly; but be good enough to tell me the conclusion you have arrived at."

"Your majesty's own decisions are never deficient in wisdom."

"What will these ambassadors say to me?"

"They will tell your majesty that they are ardently desirous of forming an alliance with you, which will be a falsehood: they will tell Spain that the three powers ought to unite so as to check the prosperity of England, and that will equally be a falsehood; for at present, the natural ally of your majesty is England, who has ships while we have none; England, who can counteract Dutch influence in India; England, in fact, a monarchical country, to which your majesty is attached by ties of relationship."

"Good; but how would you answer?"

"I should answer, sire, with the greatest possible moderation of tone, that the disposition of Holland does not seem friendly towards the Court of France; that the

symptoms of public feeling among the Dutch are alarming as regards your majesty; that certain medals have been struck with insulting devices."

"Towards me?" exclaimed the young king, excitedly.

"Oh, no! sire, no; insulting is not the word; I was mistaken, I ought to have said immeasurably flattering to the Dutch."

"Oh! if that be so, the pride of the Dutch is a matter of indifference to me," said the king, sighing.

"Your majesty is right, a thousand times right. However, it is never a mistake in politics, your majesty knows better than myself, to exaggerate a little in order to obtain a concession in your own favor. If your majesty were to complain as if your susceptibility were offended, you would stand in a far higher position with them."

"What are these medals you speak of?" inquired Louis; "for if I allude to them, I ought to know what to say."

"Upon my word, sire, I cannot very well tell you—some overweeningly conceited device—that is the sense of it; the words have little to do with the thing itself."

"Very good, I will mention the word 'medal,' and they can understand it if they like."

"Oh! they will understand without any difficulty. Your majesty can also slip in a few words about certain pamphlets which are being circulated."

"Never! Pamphlets befoul those who write them much more than those against whom they are written. M. Colbert, I thank you. You can leave me now. Do not forget the hour I have fixed, and be there yourself."

"Sire, I await your majesty's list."

"True," returned the king; and he began to meditate; he had not thought of the list in the least. The clock struck half-past eleven. The king's face revealed a violent conflict between pride and love. The political conversa-

tion had dispelled a good deal of the irritation which Louis had felt, and La Vallière's pale, worn features, in his imagination, spoke a very different language from that of the Dutch medals, or the Batavian pamphlets. He sat for ten minutes debating within himself whether he should or should not return to La Vallière; but Colbert having with some urgency respectfully requested that the list might be furnished him, the king was ashamed to be thinking of mere matters of affection where important State affairs required his attention. He therefore dictated: the queen mother, the queen, Madame, Madame de Motteville, Madame de Châtillon, Madame de Noailles; and, for the men, M. le Prince, M. de Grammont, M. de Manicamp, M. de Saint-Aignan, and the officers on duty."

"The ministers?" asked Colbert.

"As a matter of course, and the secretaries also."

"Sire, I will leave at once in order to get everything prepared; the orders will be at the different residences to-morrow."

"Say rather to-day," replied Louis mournfully, as the clock struck twelve. It was the very hour when poor La Vallière was almost dying from anguish and bitter suffering. The king's attendants entered, it being the hour of his retirement to his chamber. Louis accordingly retreated to his bedroom with a sigh; but, as he sighed, he congratulated himself on his courage, and applauded himself for having been as firm in love as in affairs of state.

CHAPTER VI.

THE AMBASSADORS.

D'Artagnan had, with very few exceptions, learned almost all the particulars of what we have just been relating; for among his friends he reckoned all the useful, serviceable people in the royal household,—officious attendants who were proud of being recognized by the captain of the musketeers, for the captain's influence was very great; and then, in addition to any ambitious views they may have imagined he could promote, they were proud of being regarded as worth being spoken to by a man as brave as D'Artagnan. In this manner D'Artagnan learned every morning what he had not been able either to see or to ascertain the night before, from the simple fact of his not being ubiquitous; so that, with the information he had been able by his own means to pick up during the day, and with what he had gathered from others, he succeeded in making up a bundle of weapons, which he was in the prudent habit of using only when occasion required. In this way D'Artagnan's two eyes rendered him the same service as the hundred eyes of Argus. Political secrets, revelations, hints or scraps of conversation dropped by the courtiers on the threshold of the royal antechamber, in this way D'Artagnan managed to ascertain, and to store away everything in the vast and impenetrable mausoleum of his memory, by the side of those royal secrets so dearly bought and faithfully preserved. He therefore knew of the king's interview with Colbert, and of the appointment made for the ambassadors in the morning, and, consequently, that the question of the medals would be

brought up for debate: and, while he was arranging and constructing the conversation upon a few chance words which had reached his ears, he returned to his post in the royal apartments, so as to be there at the very moment the king awoke. It happened that the king rose very early,—proving thereby that he, too, on his side, had slept but indifferently. Towards seven o'clock, he half-opened his door very gently. D'Artagnan was at his post. His majesty was pale, and seemed wearied; he had not, moreover, quite finished dressing.

"Send for M. de Saint-Aignan," he said.

Saint-Aignan was probably awaiting a summons, for the messenger, when he reached his apartment, found him already dressed. Saint-Aignan hastened to the king in obedience to the summons. A moment afterwards the king and Saint-Aignan passed by together—the king walking first. D'Artagnan went to the window which looked out upon the courtyard; he had no need to put himself to the trouble of watching in what direction the king went, for he had no difficulty in guessing beforehand where his majesty was going. The king, in fact, bent his steps towards the apartments of the maids of honor,—a circumstance which in no way astonished D'Artagnan, for he more than suspected, although La Vallière had not breathed a syllable on the subject, that the king had some kind of reparation to make. Saint-Aignan followed him as he had done the previous evening, rather less uneasy in his mind, though still slightly agitated, for he fervently trusted that at seven o'clock in the morning there might be only himself and the king awake among the august guests at the palace. D'Artagnan stood at the window, careless and perfectly calm in his manner. One could almost have sworn that he noticed nothing, and was utterly ignorant who were these two hunters after adventures, passing like shadows across the courtyard, wrapped

up in their cloaks. And yet, all the while that D'Artagnan appeared not to be looking at them at all, he did not for one moment lose sight of them, and while he whistled that old march of the musketeers, which he rarely recalled except under great emergencies, he conjectured and prophesied how terrible would be the storm which would be raised on the king's return. In fact, when the king entered La Vallière's apartment and found the room empty and the bed untouched, he began to be alarmed, and called out to Montalais, who immediately answered the summons; but her astonishment was equal to the king's. All that she could tell his majesty was, that she had fancied she had heard La Vallière weeping during a portion of the night, but, knowing that his majesty had paid her a visit, she had not dared to inquire what was the matter.

"But," inquired the king, "where do you suppose she is gone to?"

"Sire," replied Montalais, "Louise is of a very sentimental disposition, and as I have often seen her rise at daybreak in order to go out into the garden, she may, perhaps, be there now."

This appeared probable, and the king immediately ran down the staircase in search of the fugitive. D'Artagnan saw him grow very pale, and talking in an excited manner with his companion, as he went towards the gardens; Saint-Aignan following him, out of breath. D'Artagnan did not stir from the window, but went on whistling, looking as if he saw nothing, yet seeing everything. "Come, come," he murmured, when the king disappeared, "his majesty's passion is stronger than I thought; he is now doing, I think, what he never did for Mademoiselle de Mancini."

In a quarter of an hour the king again appeared: he had looked everywhere, was completely out of breath.

Saint-Aignan, who still followed him, was fanning himself with his hat, and, in a gasping voice, asking for information about La Vallière from such of the servants as were about, in fact from every one he met. Among others he came across Manicamp, who had arrived from Fontainebleau by easy stages; for whilst others had performed the journey in six hours, he had taken four-and-twenty.

"Have you seen Mademoiselle de la Vallière?" Saint-Aignan asked him.

Whereupon Manicamp, dreamy and absent as usual, answered, thinking that some one was asking him about De Guiche, "Thank you, the comte is a little better."

And he continued on his way until he reached the antechamber where D'Artagnan was, whom he asked to explain how it was the king looked, as he thought, so bewildered; to which D'Artagnan replied that he was quite mistaken, that the king, on the contrary, was as lively and merry as he could possibly be.

In the midst of all this, eight o'clock struck. It was usual for the king to take his breakfast at this hour, for the code of etiquette prescribed that the king should always be hungry at eight o'clock. His breakfast was laid upon a small table in his bedroom, and he ate very fast. Saint-Aignan, of whom he would not lose sight, waited on the king. He then disposed of several military audiences, during which he dispatched Saint-Aignan to see what he could find out. Then, still occupied, full of anxiety, still watching Saint-Aignan's return, who had sent out the servants in every direction, to make inquiries, and who had also gone himself, the hour of nine struck, and the king forthwith passed into his large cabinet.

As the clock was striking nine the ambassadors entered, and as it finished, the two queens and Madame made their appearance. There were three ambassadors from Holland, and two from Spain. The king glanced at them, and

then bowed; and, at the same moment, Saint-Aignan entered,—an entrance which the king regarded as far more important, in a different sense, however, than that of ambassadors, however numerous they might be, and from whatever country they came; and so, setting everything else aside, the king made a sign of interrogation to Saint-Aignan, which the latter answered by a most decisive negative. The king almost entirely lost his courage; but as the queens, the members of the nobility who were present, and the ambassadors, had their eyes fixed upon him, he overcame his emotion by a violent effort, and invited the latter to speak. Whereupon one of the Spanish deputies made a long oration, in which he boasted the advantages which the Spanish alliance would offer.

The king interrupted him, saying, "Monsieur, I trust that whatever is best for France must be exceedingly advantageous for Spain."

This remark, and particularly the peremptory tone in which it was pronounced, made the ambassadors pale, and brought the color into the cheeks of the two queens, who, being Spanish, felt wounded in their pride of relationship and nationality by this reply.

The Dutch ambassador then began to address himself to the king, and complained of the injurious suspicions which the king exhibited against the government of his country.

The king interrupted him, saying, "It is very singular, monsieur, that you should come with any complaint, when it is I rather who have reason to be dissatisfied; and yet, you see, I do not complain."

"Complain, sire, and in what respect?"

The king smiled bitterly. "Will you blame me, monsieur," he said, "if I should happen to entertain suspicions against a government which authorizes and protects international impertinence?"

"Sire!"

"I tell you," resumed the king, exciting himself by a recollection of his own personal annoyance, rather than from political grounds, "that Holland is a land of refuge for all who hate me, and especially for all who malign me."

"Oh, sire!"

"You wish for proofs, perhaps? Very good; they can be had easily enough. Whence proceed all those vile and insolent pamphlets which represent me as a monarch without glory and without authority? your printing-presses groan under their number. If my secretaries were here, I would mention the titles of the works as well as the names of the printers."

"Sire," replied the ambassador, "a pamphlet can hardly be regarded as the work of a whole nation. Is it just, is it reasonable, that a great and powerful monarch like your majesty should render a whole nation responsible for the crime of a few madmen, who are, perhaps, only scribbling in a garret for a few sous to buy bread for their family?"

"That may be the case, I admit. But when the mint itself, at Amsterdam, strikes off medals which reflect disgrace upon me, is that also the crime of a few madmen?"

"Medals!" stammered out the ambassador.

"Medals," repeated the king, looking at Colbert.

"Your majesty," the ambassador ventured, "should be quite sure——"

The king still looked at Colbert; but Colbert appeared not to understand him, and maintained an unbroken silence, notwithstanding the king's repeated hints. D'Artagnan then approached the king, and taking a piece of money out of his pocket, he placed it in the king's hands, saying, "*This* is the medal your majesty alludes to."

The king looked at it, and with a look which, ever since he had become his own master, was ever piercing as the eagle's, observed an insulting device representing Holland arresting the progress of the sun, with this inscription: "*In conspectu meo stetit sol.*"

"In my presence the sun stands still," exclaimed the king furiously. "Ah! you will hardly deny it, now, I suppose."

"And the sun," said D'Artagnan, "is this," as he pointed to the panels of the cabinet, where the sun was brilliantly represented in every direction with this motto, "*Nec pluribus impar.*"

Louis's anger, increased by the bitterness of his own personal sufferings, hardly required this additional circumstance to foment it. Every one saw, from the kindling passion in the king's eyes, that an explosion was imminent. A look from Colbert kept postponed the bursting of the storm. The ambassador ventured to frame excuses by saying that the vanity of nations was a matter of little consequence; that Holland was proud that, with such limited resources, she had maintained her rank as a great nation, even against powerful monarchs, and that if a little smoke had intoxicated his countrymen, the king would be kindly disposed, and would excuse this intoxication. The king seemed as if he would be glad of some suggestion; he looked at Colbert, who remained impassible; then at D'Artagnan, who simply shrugged his shoulders, a movement which was like the opening of the flood-gates, whereby the king's anger, which he had restrained for so long a period, now burst forth. As no one knew what direction his anger might take, all preserved a dead silence. The second ambassador took advantage of it to begin his excuses also. While he was speaking, and while the king, who had again gradually returned to his own personal reflections, was automatically listening to the voice, full of nervous anxiety,

with the air of an absent man listening to the murmuring of a cascade, D'Artagnan, on whose left hand Saint-Aignan was standing, approached the latter, and, in a voice which was loud enough to reach the king's ears, said: "Have you heard the news?"

"What news?" said Saint-Aignan.

"About La Vallière?"

The king started, and advanced his head.

"What has happened to La Vallière?" inquired Saint Aignan, in a tone which can easily be imagined.

"Ah! poor girl! she is going to take the veil."

"The veil!" exclaimed Saint-Aignan.

"The veil!" cried the king, in the midst of the ambassador's discourse; but then, mindful of the rules of etiquette, he mastered himself, still listening, however, with rapt attention.

"What order?" inquired Saint-Aignan.

"The Carmelites of Chaillot."

"Who the deuce told you that?"

"She did herself."

"You have seen her, then?"

"Nay, I even went with her to the Carmelites."

The king did not lose a syllable of this conversation; and again he could hardly control his feelings.

"But what was the cause of her flight?" inquired Saint-Aignan.

"Because the poor girl was driven away from the court yesterday," replied D'Artagnan.

He had no sooner said this, than the king, with an authoritative gesture, said to the ambassador, "Enough, monsieur, enough." Then, advancing towards the captain, he exclaimed:

"Who says Mademoiselle La Vallière is going to take religious vows?"

"M. d'Artagnan," answered the favorite.

"Is it true what you say?" said the king, turning towards the musketeer.

"As true as truth itself."

The king clenched his hands, and turned pale.

"You have something further to add, M. d'Artagnan?" he said.

"I know nothing more, sire."

"You added that Mademoiselle de la Vallière had been driven away from the court."

"Yes, sire."

"Is that true, also?"

"Ascertain for yourself, sire."

"And from whom."

"Ah!" sighed D'Artagnan, like a man declining to say anything further.

The king almost bounded from his seat, regardless of ambassadors, ministers, courtiers, queens and politics. The queen-mother rose; she had heard everything, or, if she had not heard everything, she had guessed it. Madame, almost fainting from anger and fear, endeavored to rise as the queen-mother had done; but she sank down again upon her chair, which by an instinctive movement she made roll back a few paces.

"Gentlemen," said the king, "the audience is over; I will communicate my answer, or rather my will, to Spain and to Holland;" and with a proud, imperious gesture, he dismissed the ambassadors.

"Take care, my son," said the queen-mother, indignantly, "you are hardly master of yourself, I think."

"Ah! madame," returned the young lion, with a terrible gesture, "if I am not master of myself, I will be, I promise you, of those who do me a deadly injury; come with me, M. d'Artagnan, come." And he quitted the room in the midst of general stupefaction and dismay. The king

hastily descended the staircase, and was about to cross the courtyard.

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "your majesty mistakes the way."

"No; I am going to the stables."

"That is useless, sire, for I have horses ready for your majesty."

The king's only answer was a look, but this look promised more than the ambition of three D'Artagnans could have dared to hope.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAILLOT.

ALTHOUGH they had not been summoned, Manicamp and Malicorne had followed the king and D'Artagnan. They were both exceedingly intelligent men; except that Malicorne was too precipitate, owing to ambition; while Manicamp was frequently too tardy, owing to indolence. On this occasion, however, they arrived at precisely the proper moment. Five horses were in readiness. Two were seized upon by the king and D'Artagnan, two others by Manicamp and Malicorne, while a groom belonging to the stables mounted the fifth. The cavalcade set off at a gallop. D'Artagnan had been very careful in his selection of the horses; they were the very animals for distressed lovers—horses which did not simply run, but flew. Within ten minutes after their departure, the cavalcade, amidst a cloud of dust, arrived at Chaillot. The king literally threw himself off his horse; but notwithstanding the rapidity with which he accomplished this maneuver, he found D'Artagnan already holding his stirrup. With a sign of acknowledgment to the musketeer, he threw the

bridle to the groom, and darted into the vestibule, violently pushed open the door, and entered the reception-room. Manicamp, Malicorne, and the groom, remained outside, D'Artagnan alone following him. When he entered the reception-room, the first object which met his gaze was Louise herself, not simply on her knees, but lying at the foot of a large stone crucifix. The young girl was stretched upon the damp flag-stones, scarcely visible in the gloom of the apartment, which was lighted only by means of a narrow window, protected by bars and completely shaded by creeping plants. She was alone, inanimate, cold as the stone to which she was clinging. When the king saw her in this state, he thought she was dead, and uttered a loud cry, which made D'Artagnan hurry into the room. The king had already passed one of his arms round her body, and D'Artagnan assisted him in raising the poor girl, whom the torpor of death seemed already to have taken possession of. D'Artagnan seized hold of the alarm-bell, and rang with all his might. The Carmelite sisters immediately hastened at the summons, and uttered loud exclamations of alarm and indignation at the sight of the two men holding a woman in their arms. The superior also hurried to the scene of action, but far more a creature of the world than any of the female members of the court, notwithstanding her austerity of manners, she recognized the king at the first glance, by the respect which those present exhibited for him, as well as by the imperious and authoritative way in which he had thrown the whole establishment into confusion. As soon as she saw the king, she retired to her own apartments, in order to avoid compromising her dignity. But by one of the nuns, she sent various cordials, Hungary water, etc., etc., and ordered that all the doors should be immediately closed, a command which was just in time, for the king's distress was fast becoming of a most clamorous and de-

spairing character. He had almost decided to send for his own physician, when La Vallière exhibited signs of returning animation. The first object which met her gaze, as she opened her eyes, was the king at her feet; in all probability she did not recognize him, for she uttered a deep sigh full of anguish and distress. Louis fixed his eyes devouringly upon her face; and when, in the course of a few moments, she recognized Louis, she endeavored to tear herself from his embrace.

"Oh, Heavens!" she murmured, "is not the sacrifice yet made?"

"No, no!" exclaimed the king, "and it shall *not* be made, I swear."

Notwithstanding her weakness and utter despair, she rose from the ground, saying, "It must be made, however; it must be; so do not stay me in my purpose."

"I leave you to sacrifice yourself! I! never, never!" exclaimed the king.

"Well," murmured D'Artagnan, "I may as well go now. As soon as they begin to speak, we may as well prevent there being any listeners." And he quitted the room, leaving the lovers alone.

"Sire," continued La Vallière, "not another word, I implore you. Do not destroy the only future I can hope for—my salvation; do not destroy the glory and brightness of your own future for a mere caprice."

"A caprice?" cried the king.

"Oh, sire! it is now, only, that I can see clearly into your heart."

"You, Louise, what mean you?"

"An inexplicable impulse, foolish and unreasonable in its nature, may ephemerally appear to offer a sufficient excuse for your conduct; but there are duties imposed upon you which are incompatible with your regard for a poor girl such as I am. So, forget me."

"I forget you!"

"You have already done so, once."

"Rather would I die."

"You cannot love one whose peace of mind you hold so lightly, and whom you so cruelly abandoned, last night, to the bitterness of death."

"What can you mean? Explain yourself, Louise."

"What did you ask me yesterday morning? To love you. What did you promise me in return? Never to let midnight pass without offering me an opportunity of reconciliation, if, by any chance, your anger should be roused against me."

"Oh! forgive me, Louise, forgive me! I was mad from jealousy."

"Jealousy is a sentiment unworthy of a king—a man. You may become jealous again, and will end by killing me. Be merciful, then, and leave me now to die."

"Another word, mademoiselle, in that strain, and you will see me expire at your feet."

"No, no, sire, I am better acquainted with my own demerits; and believe me, that to sacrifice yourself for one whom all despise, would be needless."

"Give me the names of those you have cause to complain of."

"I have no complaints, sire, to prefer against any one; no one but myself to accuse. Farewell, sire; you are compromising yourself in speaking to me in such a manner."

"Oh! be careful, Louise, in what you say; for you are reducing me to the darkness of despair."

"Oh! sire, sire, leave me at least the protection of Heaven, I implore you."

"No, no; Heaven itself shall not tear you from me."

"Save me, then," cried the poor girl, "from those determined and pitiless enemies who are thirsting to an-

nihilate my life and honor too. If you have courage enough to love me, show at least that you have power enough to defend me. But no; she whom you say you love, others insult and mock, and drive shamelessly away." And the gentle-hearted girl, forced, by her own bitter distress to accuse others, wrung her hands in an uncontrollable agony of tears.

"You have been driven away!" exclaimed the king. "This is the second time I have heard that said."

"I have been driven away with shame and ignominy, sire. You see, then, that I have no other protector but Heaven, no consolation but prayer, and this cloister is my only refuge."

"My palace, my whole court, shall be your park of peace. Oh! fear nothing further now, Louise; those—be they men or women—who yesterday drove you away, shall to-morrow tremble before you—to-morrow, do I say? nay, this very day have I already shown my displeasure—have already threatened. It is in my power, even now, to hurl the thunderbolt I have hitherto withheld. Louise, Louise, you shall be bitterly revenged; tears of blood shall repay you for the tears you have shed. Give me only the names of your enemies."

"Never, never."

"How can I show any anger, then?"

"Sire, those upon whom your anger would be prepared to fall, would force you to draw back your hand upraised to punish."

"Oh! you do not know me," cried the king, exasperated. "Rather than draw back, I would sacrifice my kingdom, and would abjure my family. Yes, I would strike until this arm had utterly destroyed all those who had ventured to make themselves the enemies of the gentlest and best of creatures." And, as he said these words, Louis struck his fist violently against the oaken wainscoting with a

force which alarmed La Vallière; for his anger, owing to his unbounded power, had something imposing and threatening in it, like the lightning, which may at any time prove deadly. She, who thought that her own sufferings could not be surpassed, was overwhelmed by a suffering which revealed itself by menace and by violence.

"Sire," she said, "for the last time I implore you to leave me; already do I feel strengthened by the calm seclusion of this asylum; and the protection of Heaven has reassured me; for all the petty human meannesses of this world are forgotten beneath the Divine protection. Once more, then, sire, and for the last time, I again implore you to leave me."

"Confess, rather," cried Louis, "that you have never loved me; admit that my humility and my repentance are flattering to your pride; but that my distress affects you not; that the king of this wide realm is no longer regarded as a lover whose tenderness of devotion is capable of working out your happiness; but as a despot whose caprice has crushed your very heart beneath his iron heel. Do not say you are seeking Heaven, say rather you are fleeing from the king.

Louise's heart was wrung within her, as she listened to his passionate utterance, which made the fever of hope course once more through her every vein.

"But did you not hear me say, that I have been driven away, scorned, despised?"

"I will make you the most respected, and most adored, and the most envied of my whole court"

"Prove to me that you have not ceased to love me."

"In what way?"

"By leaving me."

"I will prove it to you by never leaving you again."

"But do you imagine, sire, that I shall allow that; do you imagine that I will let you come to an open rupture

with every member of your family; do you imagine that, for my sake, you could abandon mother, wife and sister?"

"Ah! you have named them, then, at last; it is they, then, who have wrought this grievous injury? By the heaven above us, then, upon them shall my anger fall."

"That is the reason why the future terrifies me, why I refuse everything, why I do not wish you to revenge me. Tears enough have already been shed, sufficient sorrow and affliction have already been occasioned. I, at least, will never be the cause of sorrow, or affliction, or distress to whomsoever it may be, for I have mourned and suffered, and wept too much myself."

"And do you count *my* sufferings, *my* tears, as nothing?"

"In Heaven's name, sire, do not speak to me in that manner. I need all my courage to enable me to accomplish the sacrifice."

"Louise, Louise, I implore you! whatever you desire, whatever you command, whether vengeance or forgiveness, your slightest wish shall be obeyed, but do not abandon me."

"Alas! sire, we must part."

"You do not love me, then!"

"Heaven knows I do!"

"It is false, Louise; it is false."

"Oh! sire, if I did not love you, I should let you do what you please; I should let you revenge me, in return for the insult which has been inflicted on me; I should accept the brilliant triumph to my pride which you propose; and yet, you cannot deny, that I reject even the sweet compensation which your affection affords, that affection which for me is life itself, for I wished to die when I thought that you loved me no longer."

"Yes, yes; I now know, I now perceive it; you are the sweetest, best, and purest of women. There is no one so worthy as yourself, not alone of my own respect and de-

votion, but also of the respect and devotion of all who surround me; and therefore no one shall be loved like yourself; no one shall ever possess the influence over me that you wield. You wish me to be calm, to forgive?—be it so, you shall find me perfectly unmoved. You wish to reign by gentleness and clemency?—I will be clement and gentle. Dictate for me the conduct you wish me to adopt, and I will obey blindly."

"In Heaven's name, no, sire; what am I, a poor girl, to dictate to so great a monarch as yourself?"

"You are my life, the very spirit and principle of my being. Is it not the spirit that rules the body?"

"You love me, then, sire?"

"On my knees, yes; with my hands upraised to you, yes; with all the strength and power of my being, yes; I love you so deeply, that I would lay down my life for you, gladly, at your merest wish."

"Oh! sire, now that I know you love me, I have nothing to wish for in the whole world. Give me your hand, sire; and then, farewell! I have enjoyed in this life all the happiness I was ever meant for."

"Oh! no, no! your happiness is not a happiness of yesterday, it is of to-day, of to-morrow, ever enduring. The future is yours, everything which is mine is yours too. Away with these ideas of separation, away with these gloomy, despairing thoughts. You will live for me, as I will live for you, Louise." And he threw himself at her feet, embracing her knees with the wildest transports of joy and gratitude.

"Oh! sire, sire! all that is but a wild dream."

"Why, a wild dream?"

"Because I cannot return to the court. Exiled, how can I see you again? Would it not be far better to bury myself in a cloister for the rest of my life, with the rich consolation that your affection gives me, with the pulses

of your heart beating for me, and your latest confession of attachment still ringing in my ears?"

"Exiled, you!" exclaimed Louis XIV., "and who dares to exile, let me ask, when I recall?"

"Oh! sire, something which is greater than and superior to the kings even—the world and public opinion. Reflect for a moment; you cannot love a woman who has been ignominiously driven away—love one, whom your mother has stained with suspicion; one, whom your sister has threatened with disgrace; such a woman, indeed, would be unworthy of you."

"Unworthy! one who belongs to me?"

"Yes, sire, precisely on that account; from the very moment she belongs to you, the character of your mistress renders her unworthy."

"You are right, Louise; every shade of delicacy of feeling is yours. Very well, you shall not be exiled."

"Ah! from the tone in which you speak, you have not heard Madame, that is very clear."

"I will appeal from her to my mother."

"Again, sire, you have not seen your mother."

"She too!—my poor Louise! every one's hand, then, is against you."

"Yes, yes, poor Louise, who was already bending beneath the fury of the storm, when you arrived and crushed her beneath the weight of your displeasure."

"Oh! forgive me."

"You will not, I know, be able to make either of them yield; believe me, the evil cannot be repaired, for I will not allow you to use violence, or to exercise your authority."

"Very well, Louise, to prove to you how fondly I love you, I will do one thing, I will see Madame; I will make her revoke her sentence, I will compel her to do so."

"Compel? Oh! no no!"

"True; you are right. I will bend her."

Louise shook her head.

"I will entreat her, if it be necessary," said Louis. "Will you believe in my affection after that?"

Louise drew herself up! "Oh, never, never shall you humiliate yourself on my account; sooner, a thousand times, would I die."

Louis reflected, his features assumed a dark expression. "I will love as much as you have loved; I will suffer as keenly as you have suffered; this shall be my expiation in your eyes. Come, mademoiselle, put aside these paltry considerations; let us show ourselves as great as our sufferings, as strong as our affection for each other." And, as he said this, he took her in his arms, and encircled her waist with both his hands, saying, "My own love! my own dearest and best beloved, follow me."

She made a final effort, in which she concentrated—no longer all her firmness of will, for that had long since been overcome, but all her physical strength. "No!" she replied, weakly, "no! no! I should die from shame."

"No! you shall return like a queen. No one knows of your having left—except, indeed, D'Artagnan."

"He has betrayed me, then?"

"In what way?"

"He promised faithfully——"

"I promised not to say anything to the king," said D'Artagnan, putting in his head through the half-opened door, "and I kept my word; I was speaking to M. de Saint-Aignan, and it was not my fault if the king overheard me; was it, sire?"

"It is quite true," said the king; "forgive him."

La Vallière smiled, and held out her small white hand to the musketeer.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the king, "be good enough

to see if you can find a carriage for Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Sire," said the captain, "the carriage is waiting at the gate."

"You are a magic mould of forethought," exclaimed the king.

"You have taken a long time to find it out," muttered D'Artagnan, notwithstanding he was flattered by the praise bestowed upon him.

La Vallière was overcome: after a little further hesitation, she allowed herself to be led away, half fainting, by her royal lover. But, as she was on the point of leaving the room, she tore herself from the king's grasp, and returned to the stone crucifix, which she kissed, saying, "Oh, Heaven! it was thou who drewest me hither! thou, who hast rejected me; but thy grace is infinite. Whenever I shall again return, forget that I have ever separated myself from thee, for, when I return it will be—never to leave thee again."

The king could not restrain his emotion, and D'Artagnan, even, was overcome. Louis led the young girl away, lifted her into the carriage, and directed D'Artagnan to seat himself beside her, while he, mounting his horse, spurred violently towards the Palais-Royal, where, immediately on his arrival, he sent to request an audience of Madame.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADAME.

From the manner in which the king had dismissed the ambassadors, even the least clear-sighted persons belonging to the court imagined war would ensue. The ambas-

sadors themselves, but slightly acquainted with the king's domestic disturbances, had interpreted as directed against themselves the celebrated sentence: "If I be not master of myself, I, at least, will be so of those who insult me." Happily for the destinies of France and Holland, Colbert had followed them out of the king's presence for the purpose of explaining matters to them; but the two queens and Madame, who were perfectly aware of every particular that had taken place in their several households, having heard the king's remark, so full of dark meaning, retired to their own apartments in no little fear and chagrin. Madame, especially, felt that the royal anger might fall upon her, and, as she was brave and exceedingly proud, instead of seeking support and encouragement from the queen-mother, she had returned to her own apartments, if not without some uneasiness, at least without any intention of avoiding an encounter. Anne of Austria, from time to time at frequent intervals, sent messages to learn if the king had returned. The silence which the whole palace preserved upon the matter, and upon Louise's disappearance, was indicative of a long train of misfortunes to all those who knew the haughty and irritable humor of the king. But Madame, unmoved in spite of all the flying rumors, shut herself up in her apartments, sent for Montalais, and, with a voice as calm as she could possibly command, desired her to relate all she knew about the event itself. At the moment that the eloquent Montalais was concluding, with all kinds of oratorical precautions, and was recommending, if not in actual language, at least in spirit, that she should show forbearance towards La Vallière, M. Malicorne made his appearance to beg an audience of madame, on behalf of the king. Montalais's worthy friend bore upon his countenance all the signs of the very liveliest emotion. It was impossible to be mistaken; the interview which the king

requested would be one of the most interesting chapters in the history of the hearts of kings and of men. Madame was disturbed by her brother-in-law's arrival; she did not expect it so soon, nor had she, indeed, expected any direct step on Louis's part. Besides, all women who wage war successfully by indirect means, are invariably neither very skillful nor very strong when it becomes a question of accepting a pitched battle. Madame, however, was not one who ever drew back; she had the very opposite defect or qualification, in whichever light it may be considered; she took an exaggerated view of what constituted real courage; and therefore the king's message, of which Malicorne had been the bearer, was regarded by her as the bugle-note proclaiming the commencement of hostilities. She, therefore, boldly accepted the gage of battle. Five minutes afterwards the king ascended the staircase. His color was heightened from having ridden hard. His dusty and disordered clothes formed a singular contrast with the fresh and perfectly arranged toilette of Madame, who, notwithstanding the rouge on her cheeks, turned pale as Louis entered the room. Louis lost no time in approaching the object of his visit; he sat down, and Montalais disappeared.

"My dear sister," said the king, "you are aware that Mademoiselle de la Vallière fled from her own room this morning, and that she has retired to a cloister, overwhelmed by grief and despair." As he pronounced these words, the king's voice was singularly moved.

"Your majesty is the first to inform me of it," replied Madame.

"I should have thought that you might have learned it this morning, during the reception of the ambassadors," said the king.

"From your emotion, sire, I imagined that something extraordinary had happened, but without knowing what."

The king, with his usual frankness, went straight to the point. "Why did you send Mademoiselle de la Vallière away?"

"Because I had reason to be dissatisfied with her conduct," she replied, dryly.

The king became crimson, and his eyes kindled with a fire which it required all Madame's courage to support. He mastered his anger, however, and continued, "A stronger reason than that is surely requisite, for one so good and kind as you are; to turn away and dishonor not only the young girl herself, but every member of her family as well. You know that the whole city has its eyes fixed upon the conduct of the female portion of the court. To dismiss a maid of honor is to attribute a crime to her—at the very least a fault. What crime, what fault has Mademoiselle de la Vallière been guilty of?"

"Since you constitute yourself the protector of Mademoiselle de la Vallière," replied Madame, coldly, "I will give you those explanations which I should have a perfect right to withhold from every one."

"Even from the king!" exclaimed Louis, as, with a sudden gesture, he covered his head with his hat.

"You have called me your sister," said Madame, "and I am in my own apartments."

"It matters not," said the youthful monarch, ashamed at having been hurried away by his anger; "neither you nor any one else in this kingdom, can assert a right to withhold an explanation in my presence."

"Since that is the way you regard it," said Madame, in a hoarse, angry tone of voice, "all that remains for me to do is to bow submission to your majesty, and to be silent."

"Not so. Let there be no equivocation between us."

"The protection with which you surround Mademoiselle de la Vallière does not impose any respect."

"No equivocation, I repeat; you are perfectly aware that, as the head of the nobility of France, I am accountable to all for the honor of every family. You dismiss Mademoiselle de la Vallière, or whoever else it may be——" Madame shrugged her shoulders. "Or whoever else it may be, I repeat," continued the king; "and as, acting in that manner, you cast a dishonorable reflection upon that person, I ask you for an explanation, in order that I may confirm or annul the sentence."

"Annul my sentence!" exclaimed Madame, haughtily. "What! when I have discharged one of my attendants, do you order me to take her back again?" The king remained silent.

"This would be a sheer abuse of power, sire; it would be indecorous and unseemly."

"Madame!"

"As a woman, I should revolt against an abuse so insulting to me; I should no longer be able to regard myself as a princess of your blood, a daughter of a monarch; I should be the meanest of creatures, more humbled and disgraced than the servant I had sent away."

The king rose from his seat with anger. "It cannot be a heart," he cried, "you have beating in your bosom; if you act in such a way with me, I may have reason to act with corresponding severity."

It sometimes happens that in a battle a chance ball may reach its mark. The observation which the king had made without any particular intention, struck Madame home, and staggered her for a moment; some day or other she might indeed have reason to dread reprisals. "At all events, sire," she said, "explain what you require."

"I ask, madame, what has Mademoiselle de la Vallière done to warrant your conduct towards her?"

"She is the most cunning fomenter of intrigues I know; she was the occasion of two personal friends engaging in

mortal combat; and has made people talk of her in such shameless terms that the whole court is indignant at the mere sound of her name."

"She! she!" cried the king.

"Under her soft and hypocritical manner," continued Madame, "she hides a disposition full of foul and dark conceit."

"She!"

"You may possibly be deceived, sire, but I know her right well; she is capable of creating dispute and misunderstanding between the most affectionate relatives and the most intimate friends. You see that she has already sown discord betwixt us two."

"I do assure you——" said the king.

"Sire, look well into the case as it stands; we were living on the most friendly understanding, and by the artfulness of her tales and complaints, she has set your majesty against me."

"I swear to you," said the king, "that on no occasion has a bitter word ever passed her lips; I swear that, even in my wildest bursts of passion, she would not allow me to menace any one; and I swear too, that you do not possess a more devoted and respectful friend than she is."

"Friend!" said Madame, with an expression of supreme disdain.

"Take care, madame!" said the king; "you forget that you now understand me, and that from this moment everything is equalized. Mademoiselle de la Vallière will be whatever I may choose her to become; and to-morrow, if I were to determine to do so, I could seat her on a throne."

"She was not born to a throne, at least, and whatever you may do can affect the future alone, but cannot affect the past."

"Madame, towards you I have shown every kind com-

sideration, and every eager desire to please you; do not remind me that I am master."

"It is the second time, sire, that you have made that remark, and I have already informed you I am ready to submit."

"In that case, then, you will confer upon me the favor of receiving Mademoiselle de la Vallière back again."

"For what purpose, sire, since you have a throne to bestow upon her? I am too insignificant to protect so exalted a personage."

"Nay, a truce to this bitter and disdainful spirit. Grant me her forgiveness."

"*Never!*"

"You drive me, then, to open warfare in my own family."

"I, too, have a family with whom I can find refuge."

"Do you mean that as a threat, and could you forget yourself so far! Do you believe that, if you push the affront to that extent, your family would encourage you?"

"I hope, sire, that you will not force me to take any step which would be unworthy of my rank?"

"I hoped that you would remember our recent friendship, and that you would treat me as a brother."

Madame paused for a moment. "I do not disown you for a brother," she said, "in refusing your majesty an injustice."

"An injustice!"

"Oh, sire! if I informed others of La Vallière's conduct; if the queen knew——"

"Come, come, Henrietta, let your heart speak; remember that for however brief a time, you once loved me; remember, too, that human hearts should be as merciful as the heart of a sovereign Master. Do not be inflexible with others; forgive La Vallière."

"I cannot; she has offended me."

"But for my sake."

"Sire, for your sake I would do anything in the world, except that."

"You will drive me to despair—you compel me to turn to the last resource of weak people, and seek counsel of my angry and wrathful disposition."

"I advise you to be reasonable."

"Reasonable!—I can be so no longer."

"Nay, sire! I pray you——"

"For pity's sake, Henrietta; it is the first time I entreated any one, and I have no hope in any one but in you."

"Oh, sire! you are weeping."

"From rage, from humiliation. That I, the king, should have been obliged to descend to entreaty. I shall hate this moment during my whole life. You have made me suffer in one moment more distress and more degradation than I could have anticipated in the greatest extremity in life." And the king rose and gave free vent to his tears, which, in fact, were tears of anger and shame.

Madame was not touched exactly—for the best women, when their pride is hurt, are without pity; but she was afraid that the tears the king was shedding might possibly carry away every soft and tender feeling in his heart.

"Give what commands you please, sire," she said; "and since you prefer my humiliation to your own—although mine is public and yours has been witnessed but by myself alone—speak, I will obey your majesty."

"No, no, Henrietta!" exclaimed Louis, transported with gratitude, "you will have yielded to a brother's wishes."

"I no longer have any brother, since I obey."

"All that I have would be too little in return.

"How passionately you love, sire, when you do love!"

Louis did not answer. He had seized upon Madame's hand and covered it with kisses. "And so you will

receive this poor girl back again, and will forgive her; you will find how gentle and pure-hearted she is."

"I will maintain her in my household."

"No, you will give her your friendship, my sister."

"I never liked her."

"Well, for my sake, you will treat her kindly, will you not, Henrietta?"

"I will treat her as your—*mistress*."

The king rose suddenly to his feet. By this word, which had so infelicitously escaped her, Madame had destroyed the whole merit of her sacrifice. The king felt freed from all obligation. Exasperated beyond measure, and bitterly offended, he replied:

"I thank you, madame; I shall never forget the service you have rendered me." And, saluting her with an affectation of ceremony, he took his leave of her. As he passed before a glass, he saw that his eyes were red, and angrily stamped his foot on the ground. But it was too late, for Malicorne and D'Artagnan, who were standing at the door, had seen his eyes.

"The king has been crying," thought Malicorne. D'Artagnan approached the king with a respectful air, and said in a low tone of voice:

"Sire, it would be better to return to your own apartments by the small staircase."

"Why?"

"Because the dust of the road has left its traces on your face," said D'Artagnan. "By Heavens!" he thought, "when the king has given way like a child, let those look out who may make the lady weep for whom the king sheds tears.

CHAPTER IX.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE'S POCKET-HANDKERCHIEF.

MADAME was not bad-hearted—she was only hasty and impetuous. The king was not imprudent—he was simply in love. Hardly had they entered into this compact, which terminated in LaVallière's recall, when they both sought to make as much as they could by their bargain. The king wished to see La Vallière every moment of the day, while Madame, who was sensible of the king's annoyance ever since he had so entreated her, would not relinquish her revenge on La Vallière without a contest. She planted every conceivable difficulty in the king's path; he was, in fact, obliged, in order to get a glimpse of La Vallière, to be exceedingly devoted in his attentions to his sister-in-law, and this, indeed, was Madame's plan of policy. As she had chosen some one to second her efforts, and as this person was our old friend Montalais, the king found himself completely hemmed in every time he paid Madame a visit; he was surrounded, and was never left a moment alone. Madame displayed in her conversation a charm of manner and brilliancy of wit which dazzled everybody. Montalais followed her, and soon rendered herself perfectly insupportable to the king, which was, in fact, the very thing she expected would happen. She then set Malicorne at the king, who found means of informing his majesty that there was a young person belonging to the court who was exceedingly miserable; and on the king inquiring who this person was, Malicorne replied that it was Mademoiselle de Montalais. To this the king answered that

It was perfectly just that a person should be unhappy when she rendered others so. Whereupon Malicorne explained how matters stood; for he had received his directions from Montalais. The king began to open his eyes; he remarked that, as soon as he made his appearance Madame made hers too; that she remained in the corridors until after he had left; that she accompanied him back to his own apartments, fearing that he might speak in the antechambers to one of her maids of honor. One evening she went further still. The king was seated, surrounded by the ladies who were present, and holding in his hand, concealed by his lace ruffle, a small note which he wished to slip into La Vallière's hand. Madame guessed both his intention and the letter too. It was difficult to prevent the king going wherever he pleased, and yet it was necessary to prevent his going near La Vallière, or speaking to her, as by so doing he could let the note fall into her lap behind her fan, or into her pocket-handkerchief. The king, who was also on the watch, suspected that a snare was being laid for him. He rose and pushed his chair, without affectation, near Mademoiselle de Châtillon, with whom he began to talk in a light tone. They were amusing themselves in making rhymes; from Mademoiselle de Châtillon he went to Montalais, and then to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente. And thus, by this skillful maneuver, he found himself seated opposite to La Vallière, whom he completely concealed. Madame pretended to be greatly occupied, altering a group of flowers that she was working in tapestry. The king showed the corner of his letter to La Vallière, and the latter held out her handkerchief with a look that signified, "Put the letter inside." Then, as the king had placed his own handkerchief upon his chair, he was adroit enough to let it fall on the ground, so that La Vallière slipped her handkerchief on the chair. The king took it up quietly, without any one observing

what he did, placed the letter within it, and returned the handkerchief to the place he had taken it from. There was only just time for La Vallière to stretch out her hand to take hold of the handkerchief with its valuable contents.

But Madame, who had observed everything that had passed, said to Mademoiselle de Châtillon, "Châtillon, be good enough to pick up the king's handkerchief, if you please; it has fallen on the carpet."

The young girl obeyed with the utmost precipitation, the king having moved from his seat, and La Vallière being in no little degree nervous and confused.

"Ah! I beg your majesty's pardon," said Mademoiselle de Châtillon; "you have two handkerchiefs, I perceive."

And the king was accordingly obliged to put into his pocket La Vallière's handkerchief as well as his own. He certainly gained that souvenir of Louise, who lost, however, a copy of verses which had cost the king ten hours' hard labor, and which, as far as he was concerned, was perhaps as good as a long poem. It would be impossible to describe the king's anger and La Vallière's despair; but shortly afterwards a circumstance occurred which was more than remarkable. When the king left, in order to retire to his own apartments, Malicorne, informed of what had passed, one can hardly tell how, was waiting in the antechamber. The antechambers of the Palais-Royal are naturally very dark, and, in the evening, they were but indifferently lighted. Nothing pleased the king more than this dim light. As a general rule, love, whose mind and heart are constantly in a blaze, contemns all light, except the sunshine of the soul. And so the antechamber was dark; a page carried a torch before the king, who walked on slowly, greatly annoyed at what had recently occurred. Malicorne passed close to the king, almost stumbled against him in fact, and begged his forgiveness with the profoundest humility; but the king, who was in

was exceedingly ill-tempered, was very sharp in his reproof to Malicorne, who disappeared as soon and as quietly as he possibly could. Louis retired to rest, having had a misunderstanding with the queen; and the next day, as soon as he entered the cabinet, he wished to have La Vallière's handkerchief in order to press his lips to it. He called his valet.

"Fetch me," he said, "the coat I wore yesterday evening, but be very sure you do not touch anything it may contain."

The order being obeyed, the king himself searched the pocket of the coat; he found only one handkerchief, and that his own; La Vallière's had disappeared. Whilst busied with all kinds of conjectures and suspicions, a letter was brought to him from La Vallière; it ran thus:—

"How kind and good of you to have sent me those beautiful verses; how full of ingenuity and perseverance your affection is; how is it possible to help loving you so dearly!"

"What does this mean?" thought the king; "there must be some mistake. Look well about," said he to the valet, "for a pocket-handkerchief must be in one of my pockets; and if you do not find it, or if you have touched it——" He reflected for a moment. To make a state matter of the loss of the handkerchief, would be to act absurdly, and he therefore added, "There was a letter of some importance inside the handkerchief, which had somehow got among the folds of it."

"Sire," said the valet, "your majesty had only one handkerchief, and that is it."

"True, true," replied the king, setting his teeth hard together. "Oh, poverty, how I envy you! Happy is the man who can empty his own pockets of letters and handkerchiefs!"

He read La Vallière's letter over again, endeavoring to imagine in what conceivable way his verses could have reached their destination. There was a postscript to the letter:—

"I send you back by your messenger this reply, so unworthy of what you sent me."

"So far so good; I shall find out something now," he said delightedly. "Who is waiting, and who brought me this letter?"

"M. Malicorne," replied the *valet-de-chambre*, timidly.

"Desire him to come in."

Malicorne entered.

"You come from Mademoiselle de la Vallière?" said the king, with a sigh.

"Yes, sire."

"And you took Mademoiselle de la Vallière something from me?"

"I, sire?"

"Yes, you."

"Oh, no, sire."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière says so, distinctly."

"Oh, sire, Mademoiselle de la Vallière is mistaken."

The king frowned. "What jest is this?" he said; "explain yourself. Why does Mademoiselle de la Vallière call you my messenger? What did you take to that lady? Speak, monsieur, and quickly."

"Sire, I merely took Mademoiselle de la Vallière a pocket-handkerchief, that was all."

"A handkerchief,—what handkerchief?"

"Sire, at the very moment when I had the misfortune to stumble against your majesty yesterday—a misfortune which I shall deplore to the last day of my life, especially after the dissatisfaction which you exhibited—I remarked

stand motionless with despair, your majesty being at too great a distance to hear my excuses, when I saw something white lying on the ground."

"Ah!" said the king.

"I stooped down,—it was a pocket-handkerchief. For a moment I had an idea that when I stumbled against your majesty I must have been the cause of the handkerchief falling from your pocket; but as I felt it all over very respectfully, I perceived a cipher at one of the corners, and, on looking at it closely, I found it was Mademoiselle de la Vallière's cipher. I presumed that on her way to Madame's apartment in the earlier part of the evening she had let her handkerchief fall, and I accordingly hastened to restore it to her as she was leaving; and that is all I gave to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, I entreat your majesty to believe." Malicorne's manner was so simple, so full of contrition, and marked with such extreme humility, that the king was greatly amused in listening to him. He was as pleased with him for what he had done as if he had rendered him the greatest service.

"This is the second fortunate meeting I have had with you, monsieur," he said; "you may count upon my good intentions."

The plain and sober truth was, that Malicorne had picked the king's pocket of the handkerchief as dexterously as any of the pickpockets of the good city of Paris could have done. Madame never knew of this little incident, but Montalais gave La Vallière some idea of the manner in which it had really happened, and La Vallière afterwards told the king, who laughed exceedingly at it, and pronounced Malicorne to be a first rate politician. Louis XIV. was right, and it is well known that he was tolerably well acquainted with human nature.

CHAPTER X.

WHICH TREATS OF GARDENERS, OF LADDERS, AND MAIDS OF HONOR.

MIRACLES, unfortunately, could not be always happening, whilst Madame's ill-humor still continued. In a week's time, matters had reached such a point, that the king could no longer look at La Vallière without a look full of suspicion crossing his own. Whenever a promenade was proposed, Madame, in order to avoid the recurrence of similar scenes to that of the thunder-storm, or the royal oak, had a variety of indispositions ready prepared; and, thanks to them, she was unable to go out, and her maids of honor were obliged to remain indoors also. There was not the slightest chance or means of paying a nocturnal visit; for in this respect, the king had, on the very first occasion, experienced a severe check, which happened in the following manner. As at Fontainebleau, he had taken Saint-Aignan with him one evening, when he wished to pay La Vallière a visit; but he had found no one but Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who had begun to call out "Fire!" and "Thieves!" in such a manner, that a perfect legion of chamber-maids, attendants, and pages, ran to her assistance; so that Saint-Aignan, who had remained behind in order to save the honor of his royal master, who had fled precipitately, was obliged to submit to a severe scolding from the queen-mother, as well as from Madame herself. In addition, he had, the next morning, received two challenges from the De Montemarté family, and the king had been obliged to interfere. This mistake had been owing to the circumstance of

Madame having suddenly ordered a change in the apartments of her maids of honor, and directed La Vallière and Montalais to sleep in her own cabinet. No gateway, therefore, was any longer open—not even communication by letter; to write under the eyes of so ferocious an Argus as Madame, whose temper and disposition were so uncertain, was to run the risk of exposure to the greatest danger; and it can well be conceived into what a state of continuous irritation, and ever increasing anger, all these petty annoyances threw the young lion. The king almost tormented himself to death endeavoring to discover a means of communication; and, as he did not think proper to call in the aid of Malicorne or D'Artagnan, the means were not discovered at all. Malicorne had, indeed, occasional brilliant flashes of imagination, with which he tried to inspire the king with confidence; but, whether from shame or suspicion, the king, who had at first begun to nibble at the bait, soon abandoned the hook. In this way, for instance, one evening, while the king was crossing the garden, and looking up at Madame's windows, Malicorne stumbled over a ladder lying beside a border of box, and said to Manicamp, then walking with him behind the king. "Did you not see that I just now stumbled against a ladder, and was nearly thrown down?"

"No," said Manicamp, as usual very absent-minded, "but it appears you did not fall."

"That doesn't matter; but it is not on that account, the less dangerous to leave ladders lying about in that manner."

"True, one might hurt one's self, especially when troubled with fits of absence of mind."

"I don't mean that; what I did mean, was that it is dangerous to allow ladders to lie about so near the windows of the maids of honor." Louis started imperceptibly.

"Why so?" inquired Manicamp.

"Speak louder," whispered Malicorne, as he touched him with his arm.

"Why so?" said Manicamp, louder. The king listened.

"Because, for instance," said Malicorne, "a ladder nineteen feet high is just the height of the cornice of those windows." Manicamp, instead of answering, was dreaming of something else.

"Ask me, can't you, what windows I mean," whispered Malicorne.

"But what windows are you referring to?" said Manicamp, aloud.

"The windows of Madame's apartments."

"Eh!"

"Oh! I don't say that any one would ever venture to go up a ladder into Madame's room; but in Madame's cabinet, merely separated by a partition, sleep two exceedingly pretty girls, Mesdemoiselles de la Vallière and de Montalais."

"By a partition?" said Manicamp.

"Look; you see how brilliantly lighted Madame' apartments are—well, do you see those two windows?"

"Yes."

"And that window close to the others, but more dimly lighted?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is the room of the maids of honor. Look, there is Mademoiselle de la Vallière opening the window. Ah! how many soft things could an enterprising lover say to her, if he only suspected that there was lying here a ladder nineteen feet long, which would just reach the cornice."

"But she is not alone; you said Mademoiselle de Montalais is with her."

"Mademoiselle de Montalais counts for nothing; she is her oldest friend, and exceedingly devoted to her—a

positive well, into which can be thrown all sorts of secrets one might wish to get rid of."

The king did not lose a single syllable of this conversation. Malicorne even remarked that his majesty slackened his pace, in order to give him time to finish. So, when they arrived at the door, Louis dismissed every one, with the exception of Malicorne—a circumstance which excited no surprise, for it was known that the king was in love; and they suspected he was going to compose some verses by moonlight; and, although there was no moon that evening, the king might, nevertheless, have some verses to compose. Every one, therefore, took his leave; and, immediately afterwards, the king turned toward Malicorne, who respectfully waited until his majesty should address him. "What were you saying, just now, about a ladder, Monsieur Malicorne?" he asked.

"Did I say anything about ladders, sire?" said Malicorne, looking up, as if in search of words which had flown away.

"Yes, of a ladder nineteen feet long."

"Oh, yes, sire, I remember; but I spoke to M. Maniamp, and I should not have said a word had I known your majesty was near enough to hear us."

"And why would you not have said a word?"

"Because I should not have liked to get the gardener into a scrape who left it there—poor fellow!"

"Don't make yourself uneasy on that account. What is this ladder like?"

"If your majesty wishes to see it, nothing is easier, for there it is."

"In that box hedge?"

"Exactly."

"Show it to me."

Malicorne turned back, and led the king up to the ladder saying, "This is it, sire."

"Pull it this way a little."

When Malicorne had brought the ladder on to the gravel walk, the king began to step its whole length. "Hum!" he said; "you say it is nineteen feet long?"

"Yes, sire."

"Nineteen feet—that is rather long; I hardly believe it can be so long as that."

"You cannot judge very correctly with the ladder in that position, sire. If it were upright, against a tree or a wall, for instance, you would be better able to judge, because the comparison would assist you a good deal."

"Oh! it does not matter, M. Malicorne; but I can hardly believe that the ladder is nineteen feet high."

"I know how accurate your majesty's glance is, and yet I would wager."

The king shook his head. "There is one unanswerable means of verifying it," said Malicorne.

"What is that?"

"Every one knows, sire, that the ground-floor of the palace is eighteen feet high."

"True, that is very well known."

"Well, sire, if I place the ladder against the wall, we shall be able to ascertain."

"True."

Malicorne took up the ladder, like a feather, and placed it upright against the wall. And, in order to try the experiment, he chose, or chance, perhaps, directed him to choose, the very window of the cabinet where La Vallière was. The ladder just reached the edge of the cornice, that is to say, the sill of the window; so that, by standing upon the last round but one of the ladder, a man of about the middle height, as the king was, for instance, could easily talk with those who might be in the room. Hardly had the ladder been properly placed, when the king, dropping the assumed part he had been

playing in the comedy, began to ascend the rounds of the ladder, which Malicorne held at the bottom. But hardly had he completed half the distance when a patrol of Swiss guards appeared in the garden, and advanced straight towards them. The king descended with the utmost precipitation, and concealed himself among the trees. Malicorne at once perceived that he must offer himself as a sacrifice; for if he, too, were to conceal himself, the guard would search everywhere until they had found either himself or the king, perhaps both. It would be far better, therefore, that he alone should be discovered. And, consequently, Malicorne hid himself so clumsily that he was the only one arrested. As soon as he was arrested, Malicorne was taken to the guard-house: and there, he declared who he was, and was immediately recognized. In the meantime, by concealing himself first behind one clump of trees and then behind another, the king reached the side door of his apartment, very much humiliated, and still more disappointed. More than that, the noise made in arresting Malicorne had drawn La Vallière and Montalais to their window; and even Madame herself had appeared at her own, with a pair of wax candles, one in each hand, clamorously asking what was the matter.

In the meantime, Malicorne sent for D'Artagnan, who did not lose a moment in hurrying to him. But it was in vain he attempted to make him understand his reasons, and in vain also that D'Artagnan did understand them; and, further, it was equally in vain that both their sharp and inventive minds endeavored to give another turn to the adventure; there was no other resource left for Malicorne, but to let it be supposed that he had wished to enter Mademoiselle de Montalais's apartment, as Saint-Aignan had passed for having wished to force Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's door. Madame was in

flexible; in the first place, because if Malicorne had, in fact, wished to enter her apartment at night through the window, and by means of the ladder, in order to see Montalais, it was a punishable offense on Malicorne's part, and he must be punished accordingly; and, in the second place, if Malicorne, instead of acting in his own name, had acted as an intermediary between La Vallière and a person whose name it was superfluous to mention, his crime was in that case even greater, since love, which is an excuse for everything, did not exist in the case as an excuse. Madame therefore made the greatest possible disturbance about the matter, and obtained his dismissal from Monsieur's household, without reflecting, poor blind creature, that both Malicorne and Montalais held her fast in their clutches in consequence of her visit to De Guiche, and in a variety of other ways equally delicate. Montalais, who was perfectly furious, wished to revenge herself immediately, but Malicorne pointed out to her that the king's countenance would repay them for all the disgraces in the world, and that it was a great thing to have to suffer on his majesty's account.

Malicorne was perfectly right, and, therefore, although Montalais had the spirit of ten women in her, he succeeded in bringing her round to his own opinion. And we must not omit to state that the king helped them to console themselves, for, in the first place, he presented Malicorne with fifty thousand francs as a compensation for the post he had lost, and, in the next place, he gave him an appointment in his own household, delighted to have an opportunity of revenging himself in such a manner upon Madame for all she had made him and La Vallière suffer. But as Malicorne could no longer carry significant handkerchiefs for him or plant convenient ladders, the royal lover was in a terrible state. There seemed to be no hope, therefore, of ever getting near La Vallière again.

so long as she should remain at the Palais-Royal. All the dignities and all the money in the world could not remedy that. Fortunately, however, Malicorne was on the look-out, and this so successfully that he met Montalais, who, to do her justice, it must be admitted, was doing her best to meet Malicorne. "What do you do during the night in Madame's apartment?" he asked the young girl.

"Why, I go to sleep, of course," she replied.

"But it is very wrong to sleep; it can hardly be possible that with the pain you are suffering, you can manage to do so."

"And what am I suffering from, may I ask?"

"Are you not in despair at my absence?"

"Of course not, since you have received fifty thousand francs and an appointment in the king's household."

"That is a matter of no moment; you are exceedingly afflicted at not seeing me as you used to see me formerly, and more than all, you are in despair at my having lost Madame's confidence; come, now, is not that true?"

"Perfectly true."

"Very good; your distress of mind prevents you sleeping at night, and so you sob, and sigh, and blow your nose ten times every minute as loud as possible."

"But, my dear Malicorne, Madame cannot endure the slightest noise near her."

"I know that perfectly well; of course, she can't endure anything; and so, I tell you, when she hears your deep distress, she will turn you out of her room without a moment's delay."

"I understand."

"Very fortunate you *do*."

"Well, and what will happen next?"

"The next thing that will happen will be, that La Vallère, finding herself alone without you, will groan and

utter such loud lamentations, that she will exhibit despair enough for two."

"In that case she will be put into *another* room," don't you see?"

"Precisely so."

"Yes, but which?"

"Which?"

"Yes; that will puzzle you to say, Mr. Inventor-General."

"Not at all; wherever and whatever the room may be, it will always be preferable to Madame's own room."

"That is true."

"Very good, so begin your lamentations to-night."

"I certainly will not fail to do so."

"And give La Vallière a hint also."

"Oh! don't fear her, she cries quite enough already to herself."

"Very well! all she has to do is to cry out loudly."

And they separated.

CHAPTER XI.

WHICH TREATS OF CARPENTRY OPERATIONS, AND FURNISHES DETAILS UPON THE MODE OF CONSTRUCTING STAIRCASES.

The advice which had been given to Montalais was communicated by her to La Vallière, who could not but acknowledge that it was by no means deficient in judgment, and who, after a certain amount of resistance, rising rather from timidity than indifference to the project, resolved to put it into execution. This story of the two girls weeping, and filling Madame's bedroom with the noisiest lamentations, was Malicorne's *chef-d'œuvre*. As nothing is so probable as improbability, so natural as

romance, this kind of Arabian Nights story succeeded perfectly with Madame. The first thing she did, was to send Montalais away, and then, three days, or rather three nights, afterwards, she had La Vallière removed. She gave the latter one of the small rooms on the top story, situated immediately over the apartments allotted to the gentlemen of Monsieur's suite. One story only, that is to say, a mere flooring separated the maids of honor from the officers and gentlemen of her husband's household. A private staircase, which was placed under Madame de Navailles's surveillance, was the only means of communication. For greater safety, Madame de Navailles, who had heard of his majesty's previous attempts, had the windows of the rooms and the openings of the chimneys carefully barred. There was, therefore, every possible security provided for Mademoiselle de la Vallière, whose room now bore more resemblance to a cage than to anything else. When Mademoiselle de la Vallière was in her own room, and she was there very frequently, for Madame scarcely ever had any occasion for her services, since she once knew she was under Madame de Navailles's inspection, Mademoiselle de la Vallière had no better means of amusing herself than looking through the bars of her windows. It happened, therefore, that one morning, as she was looking out as usual, she perceived Malicorne at one of the windows exactly opposite to her own. He held a carpenter's rule in his hand, was surveying the buildings, and seemed to be adding up some figures on paper. La Vallière recognized Malicorne and nodded to him; Malicorne, in his turn, replied by a formal bow, and disappeared from the window. She was surprised at this marked coolness, so different from his usual unfailing good-humor, but she remembered that he had lost his appointment on her account, and that he could hardly be very amiably disposed towards her, since, in all probability,

she would never be in a position to make him any recompense for what he had lost. She knew how to forgive offenses, and with still more readiness could she sympathize with misfortune. La Vallière would have asked Montalais her opinion, if she had been within hearing, but she was absent, it being the hour she commonly devoted to her own correspondence. Suddenly La Vallière observed something thrown from the window where Malicorne had been standing, pass across the open space which separated the two windows from each other, enter her room through the iron bars, and roll upon the floor. She advanced with no little curiosity towards this object, and picked it up; it was a wooden reel for silk, only, in this instance, instead of silk, a piece of paper was rolled round it. La Vallière unrolled it, and read as follows:—

"MADEMOISELLE—I am exceedingly anxious to learn two things: the first is, to know if the flooring of your apartment is wood or brick; the second, to ascertain at what distance your bed is placed from the window. Forgive my importunity, and will you be good enough to send me an answer by the same way you receive this letter—that is to say, by means of the silk winder; only, instead of throwing it into my room, as I have thrown it into yours, which will be too difficult for you to attempt, have the goodness merely to let it fall. Believe me, mademoiselle, your most humble, most respectful servant, MALICORNE.

"Write the reply, if you please, upon the letter itself."

"Ah! poor fellow," exclaimed La Vallière, "he must have gone out of his mind;" and she directed towards her correspondent—of whom she caught but a faint glimpse, in consequence of the darkness of his room—a look full of compassionate consideration. Malicorne understood her

nd shook his head, as if he meant to say, "No, no, I am ot out of my mind; be quite satisfied."

She smiled, as if still in doubt.

"No, no," he signified by a gesture, "my head is right," nd pointed to his head, then, after moving his hand ke a man who writes very rapidly, he put his hands ogether as if entreating her to write.

La Vallière, even if he were mad, saw no impropriety in doing what Malicorne requested her; she took a pencil and wrote "wood," and then walked slowly from her window to her bed, and wrote, "Six paces!" and having done this, she looked out again at Malicorne, who bowed to her, signifying that he was about to descend. La Vallière understood that it was to pick up the silk winder. She approached the window, and, in accordance with Malicorne's instructions, let it fall. The winder was still rolling along the flag-stones as Malicorne started after it, overtook and picked it up, and beginning to peel it as a monkey would do with a nut, he ran straight towards M. de Saint-Aignan's apartments. Saint-Aignan had chosen, or rather solicited, that his rooms might be as near the king as possible, as certain plants seek the sun's rays in order to develop themselves more luxuriantly. His apartment consisted of two rooms, in that portion of the palace occupied by Louis XIV. himself. M. de Saint-Aignan was very proud of this proximity, which afforded easy access to his majesty, and, more than that, the favor of occasional unexpected meetings. At the moment we are now referring to, he was engaged in having both his rooms magnificently carpeted, with expectation of receiving the honor of frequent visits from the king; for his majesty, since his passion for La Vallière, had chosen Saint-Aignan as his confidant, and could not, in fact, do without him, either night or day. Malicorne introduced himself to the comte, and met with no difficulties, because

he had been favorably noticed by the king; and also, because the credit which one man may happen to enjoy is always a bait for others. Saint-Aignan asked his visitor if he brought any news with him.

"Yes; great news," replied the latter.

"Ah! ah!" said Saint-Aignan, "what is it?"

"Mademoiselle de La Vallière has changed her quarters."

"What do you mean?" said Saint-Aignan, opening his eyes very wide. "She was living in the same apartments as Madame."

"Precisely so; but Madame got tired of her proximity, and has installed her in a room which is situated exactly above your future apartment."

"What! up there," exclaimed Saint-Aignan, with surprise, and pointing at the floor above him with his finger.

"No," said Malicorne, "yonder," indicating the building opposite.

"What do you mean, then, by saying that her room is above my apartment?"

"Because I am sure that your apartment *ought* providentially, to be under Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room."

Saint-Aignan, at this remark, gave poor Malicorne a look, similar to one of those La Vallière had already given a quarter of an hour before, that is to say, he thought he had lost his senses.

"Monsieur," said Malicorne to him, "I wish to answer what you are thinking about."

"What do you mean by 'what I am thinking about?'"

"My reason is, that you have not clearly understood what I want to convey."

"I admit it."

"Well, then, you are aware that underneath the apartments set apart for Madame's maids of honor the

gentlemen in attendance on the king and on Monsieur are lodged."

"Yes, I know that, since Manicamp, De Wardes, and others are living there."

"Precisely. Well, monsieur, admire the singularity of the circumstance; the two rooms destined for M. de Guiche, are exactly the very two rooms situated underneath those which Mademoiselle de Montalais and Mademoiselle de la Vallière occupy."

"Well; what then?"

"'What then,' do you say? Why, these two rooms are empty, since M. de Guiche is now lying wounded at Fontainebleau."

"I assure you, my dear fellow, I cannot grasp your meaning."

"Well! if I had the happiness to call myself Saint-Aignan, I should guess immediately."

"And what would you do then?"

"I should at once change the rooms I am occupying here, for those which M. de Guiche is not using yonder."

"Can you suppose such a thing?" said Saint-Aignan disdainfully. "What! abandon the chief post of honor, the proximity to the king, a privilege conceded only to princes of the blood, to dukes, and peers! Permit me to tell you, my dear Monsieur de Malicorne, that you must be out of your senses."

"Monsieur," replied the young man, seriously, "you commit two mistakes. My name is Malicorne, simply; and I am in perfect possession of all my senses." Then, drawing a paper from his pocket, he said, "Listen to what I am going to say; and, afterwards, I will show you this paper."

"I am listening," said Saint-Aignan.

"You know that Madame looks after La Vallière as carefully as Argus did after the nymph Io."

"I do."

"You know that the king has sought for an opportunity, but uselessly, of speaking to the prisoner, and that neither you nor myself have yet succeeded in procuring him this piece of good fortune."

"You certainly ought to know something about the subject, my poor Malicorne," said Saint-Aignan, smiling.

"Very good; what do you suppose would happen to the man whose imagination devised some means of bringing the lovers together?"

"Oh! the king would set no bounds to his gratitude."

"Let me ask you, then, M. de Saint-Aignan, whether you would not be curious to taste a little of this royal gratitude?"

"Certainly," replied Saint-Aignan, "any favor of my master, as a recognition of the proper discharge of my duty, would assuredly be most precious."

"In that case, look at this paper, monsieur le comte."

"What is it—a plan?"

"Yes; a plan of M. de Guiche's two rooms, which, in all probability, will soon be your two rooms."

"Oh! no, whatever may happen."

"Why so?"

"Because my own rooms are the envy of too many gentlemen, to whom I certainly shall not give them up; M. de Roquelaure, for instance, M. de la Ferté, and M. de Dangeau, would all be anxious to get them."

"In that case I shall leave you, monsieur le comte, and I shall go and offer to one of those gentlemen the plan I have just shown you, together with the advantages annexed to it."

"But why do you not keep them for yourself?" inquired Saint-Aignan, suspiciously.

"Because the king would never do me the honor of

paying me a visit openly, whilst he would readily go and see any one of those gentlemen."

"What! the king would go and see any one of those gentlemen?"

"Go! most certainly he would ten times instead of once. Is it possible you can ask me if the king would go to an apartment which would bring him nearer to Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Yes, indeed, delightfully near her, with a floor between them."

Malicorne unfolded the piece of paper which had been wrapped round the bobbin. "Monsieur le comte," he said, "have the goodness to observe that the flooring of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room is merely a wooden flooring."

"Well?"

"Well! all you would have to do would be to get hold of a journeyman carpenter, lock him up in your apartments, without letting him know where you have taken him to, and let him make a hole in your ceiling, and consequently in the flooring of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Saint-Aignan, as if dazzled.

"What is the matter?" said Malicorne.

"Nothing, except that you have hit upon a singular, bold idea, monsieur."

"It will seem a very trifling one to the king, I assure you."

"Lovers never think of the risk they run."

"What danger do you apprehend, monsieur le comte?"

"Why, effecting such an opening as that will make a terrible noise: it could be heard all over the palace."

"Oh! monsieur le comte, I am quite sure that the carpenter I shall select will not make the slightest noise in

the world. He will saw an opening three feet square with a saw covered with tow, and no one, not even those adjoining, will know that he is at work."

"My dear Monsieur Malicorne, you astound, you positively bewilder me."

"To continue," replied Malicorne, quietly, "in the room the ceiling of which you have cut through, you will put up a staircase, which will either allow Mademoiselle de la Vallière to descend into your room, or the king to ascend into Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room."

"But the staircase will be seen."

"No; for in your room it will be hidden by a partition, over which you will throw a tapestry similar to that which covers the rest of the apartment; and in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room it will not be seen, for the trap-door, which will be a part of the flooring itself, will be made to open under the bed."

"Of course," said Saint-Aignan, whose eyes began to sparkle with delight.

"And now, monsieur le comte, there is no occasion to make you admit that the king will frequently come to the room where such a staircase is constructed. I think that M. Dangeau, particularly, will be struck by my idea, and I shall now go and explain to him."

"But, my dear Monsieur Malicorne, you forget that you spoke to me about it the first, and that I have consequently the right of priority."

"Do you wish for the preference?"

"Do I wish it? Of course I do."

"The fact is, Monsieur de Saint-Aignan, I am presenting you with a Jacob's ladder, which is better than the promise of an additional step in the peerage—perhaps, even, with a good estate to accompany your dukedom."

"At least," replied Saint-Aignan, "it will give me an opportunity of showing the king that he is not mistaken

occasionally calling me his friend; an opportunity, dear M. Malicorne, for which I am indebted to you."

"And which you will not forget to remember?" inquired Malicorne, smiling.

"Nothing will delight me more, monsieur."

"But I am not the king's friend; I am simply his attendant."

"Yes; and if you imagine that that staircase is as good as a dukedom for myself, I think there will certainly be letters of nobility on the top of it for you."

Malicorne bowed.

"All I have to do now," said Saint-Aignan, "is to move as soon as possible."

"I do not think the king will object to it. Ask his permission, however."

"I will go and see him this very moment."

"And I will run and get the carpenter I was speaking of."

"When will he be here?"

"This very evening."

"Do not forget your precautions."

"He shall be brought with his eyes bandaged."

"And I will send you one of my carriages."

"Without arms."

"And one of my servants without livery. But stay, what will La Vallière say if she sees what is going on?"

"Oh! I can assure you she will be very much interested in the operation, and I am equally sure that if the king has not courage enough to ascend to her room, she will have sufficient curiosity to come down to him."

"We will live in hope," said Saint-Aignan; "and now I am off to his majesty. At what time will the carpenter be here?"

"At eight o'clock."

"How long do you suppose he will take to make this opening?"

"About a couple of hours; only afterwards he must have sufficient time to construct what may be called the hyphen between the two rooms. One night and a portion of the following day will do; we must not reckon upon less than two days, including putting up the staircase."

"Two days, that is a very long time."

"Nay; when one undertakes to open up communications with paradise itself, we must at least take care that the approaches are respectable."

"Quite right; so farewell for a short time, dear M. Malicorne. I shall begin to remove the day after to-morrow, in the evening."

CHAPTER XII.

THE PROMENADE BY TORCHLIGHT.

SAINT-AIGNAN, delighted with what he had just heard, and rejoiced at what the future foreshadowed for him, bent his steps towards De Guiche's two rooms. He who, a quarter of an hour previously, would hardly yield up his own rooms for a million francs, was now ready to expend a million, if it were necessary, upon the acquisition of the two happy rooms he coveted so eagerly. But he did not meet with so many obstacles. M. de Guiche did not yet know where he was to lodge, and, besides, was still far too ill to trouble himself about his lodgings; and so Saint-Aignan obtained De Guiche's two rooms without difficulty. As for M. Dangeau, he was so immeasurably delighted, that he did not even give himself the trouble to

think, whether Saint-Aignan had any particular reason for removing. Within an hour after Saint-Aignan's new resolution, he was in possession of the two rooms; and ten minutes later Malicorne entered, followed by the upholsterers. During this time, the king asked for Saint-Aignan; the valet ran to his late apartments and found M. Dangeau there; Dangeau sent him on to De Guiche's, and Saint-Aignan was found there; but a little delay had of course taken place, and the king had already exhibited once or twice evident signs of impatience, when Saint-Aignan entered his royal master's presence, quite out of breath. "You, too, abandon me, then," said Louis XIV., in a similar tone of lamentation to that with which Cæsar, eighteen hundred years previously, had pronounced the *Et tu quoque.*

"Sire, I am very far from abandoning you, for on the contrary, I am busily occupied in changing my lodgings."

"What do you mean? I thought you had finished moving three days ago."

"Yes, sire. But I don't find myself comfortable where I am, and so I am going to change to the opposite side of the building."

"Was I not right when I said you were abandoning me?" exclaimed the king. "Oh! this exceeds all endurance. But so it is: there was only one woman for whom my heart cared at all, and all my family is leagued together to tear her from me; and my friend, to whom I confided my distress, and who helped me to bear up under it, has become wearied of my complaints and is going to leave me without even asking my permission."

Saint-Aignan began to laugh. The king at once guessed there must be some mystery in this want of respect.

"What is it?" cried the king, full of hope.

"This, sire, that the friend whom the king calumniates

is going to try if he cannot restore to his sovereign the happiness he has lost."

"Are you going to let me see La Vallière?" said Louis XIV.

"I cannot say so, positively, but I hope so."

"How—how?—tell me that, Saint-Aignan. I wish to know what your project is, and to help you with all my power."

"Sire," replied Saint-Aignan, "I cannot, even myself, tell very well how I must set about attaining success; but I have every reason to believe that from to-morrow——"

"To-morrow, do you say! What happiness! But why are you changing your rooms?"

"In order to serve your majesty to better advantage."

"How can your moving serve me?"

"Do you happen to know where the two rooms destined for De Guiche are situated?"

"Yes."

"Well, your majesty now knows where I am going."

"Very likely; but that does not help me."

"What! is it possible you do not understand, sire, that above De Guiche's lodgings are two rooms, one of which is Mademoiselle de Montalais's, and the other——"

"La Vallière's, is it not so, Saint-Aignan? Oh! yes, yes. It is a brilliant idea, Saint-Aignan, a true friend's idea, a poet's idea. By bringing me nearer her from whom the world seems to unite to separate me—you are far more than Pylades was for Orestes, or Patroclus for Achilles."

"Sire," said Aignan, with a smile, "I question whether, if your majesty were to know my projects in their full extent, you would continue to pronounce such a pompous eulogium upon me. Ah! sire, I know how very different are the epithets which certain Puritans of the court will not fail to apply to me when they learn what I intend to do for your majesty."

"Saint-Aignan, I am dying with impatience; I am in a perfect fever; I shall never be able to wait until to-morrow—to-morrow! why, to-morrow is an eternity!"

"And yet, sire, I shall require you, if you please, to go out presently and divert your impatience by a good walk."

"With you—agreed; we will talk about your projects, we will talk of her."

"Nay, sire; I remain here."

"Whom shall I go out with, then?"

"With the queen and all the ladies of the court."

"Nothing shall induce me to do that, Saint-Aignan."

"And yet, sire, you must."

"*Must?*—no, no—a thousand times, no! I will never again expose myself to the horrible torture of being close to her, of seeing her, of touching her dress as I pass by her, and yet not be able to say a word to her. No, I renounce a torture which you suppose will bring me happiness, but which consumes and eats away my very life; to see her in the presence of strangers, and not to tell her that I love her, when my whole being reveals my affection and betrays me to every one; no! I have sworn never to do it again, and I will keep my oath."

"Yet, sire, pray listen to me for a moment."

"I will listen to nothing, Saint-Aignan."

"In that case, I will continue; it is most urgent, sire—pray understand me, it is of the greatest importance—that Madame and her maids of honor should be absent for two hours from the palace."

"I cannot understand your meaning at all, Saint-Aignan."

"It is hard for me to have to give my sovereign directions what to do; but under these circumstances I do give you directions, sire; and either a hunting or a promenade party must be got up."

"But if I were to do what you wish, it would be a

caprice, a mere whim. In displaying such an impatient humor I show my whole court that I have no control over my own feelings. Do not people already say that I am dreaming of the conquest of the world, but that I ought previously to begin by achieving a conquest over myself?"

"Those who say so, sire, are as insolent as they would like to be thought facetious; but whoever they may be, if your majesty prefers to listen to them, I have nothing further to say. In such a case, that which we have fixed to take place to-morrow must be postponed indefinitely."

"Nay, Saint-Aignan, I will go out this evening—I will go by torchlight to Saint-Germain: I will breakfast there to-morrow, and will return to Paris by three o'clock. Will that do?"

"Admirably."

"In that case I will set out this evening at o'clock."

"Your majesty has fixed upon the exact minute."

"And you positively will tell me nothing more?"

"It is because I have nothing more to tell you. Industry counts for something in this world, sire; but still, chance plays so important a part in it that I have been accustomed to leave her the sidewalk, confident that she will manage so as to always take the street."

"Well, I abandon myself entirely to you."

"And you are quite right."

Comforted in this manner, the king went immediately to Madame, to whom he announced the intended expedition. Madame fancied at the first moment that she saw in this unexpectedly arranged party a plot of the king's to converse with La Vallière, either on the road under cover of the darkness, or in some other way, but she took especial care not to show any of her fancies to her brother-in-law, and accepted the invitation with a smile upon her lips. She gave directions aloud that her maids of honor should

accompany her, secretly intending in the evening to take the most effectual steps to interfere with his majesty's attachment. Then, when she was alone, and at the very moment the poor lover, who had issued orders for the departure, was reveling in the idea that Mademoiselle de la Vallière would form one of the party—luxuriating in the sad happiness persecuted lovers enjoy of realizing through the sense of sight alone all the transports of possession, Madame, who was surrounded by her maids of honor was saying :—"Two ladies will be enough for me this evening, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and Mademoiselle de Montalais."

La Vallière had anticipated her own omission, and was prepared for it: but persecution had rendered her courageous, and she did not give Madame the pleasure of seeing on her face the impression of the shock her heart received. On the contrary, smiling with that ineffable gentleness which gave an angelic expression to her features—"In that case, madame, I shall be at liberty this evening, I suppose?" she said.

"Of course."

"I shall be able to employ it, then, in progressing with that piece of tapestry which your highness has been good enough to notice, and which I have already had the honor of offering to you."

And having made a respectful obeisance she withdrew to her own apartment; Mademoiselles de Tonnay-Charente and de Montalais did the same. The rumor of the intended promenade soon spread all over the palace; ten minutes afterwards Malicorne learned Madame's resolution, and slipped under Montalais's door a note, in the following terms—

"L. V. must positively pass the night with Madame."

Montalais, in pursuance of the compact she had entered

into, began by burning the letter, and then sat down to reflect. Montalais was a girl full of expedients, and so she very soon arranged her plan. Towards five o'clock, which was the hour for her to repair to Madame's apartment, she was running across the courtyard, and had reached within a dozen paces a group of officers, when she uttered a cry, fell gracefully on one knee, rose again, with difficulty, and walked on limpingly. The gentlemen ran forward to her assistance; Montalais had sprained her foot. Faithful to the discharge of her duty, she insisted, however, notwithstanding her accident, upon going to Madame's apartment.

"What is the matter, and why do you limp so?" she inquired: "I mistook you for La Vallière."

Montalais related how it had happened, that in hurrying on, in order to arrive as quickly as possible, she had sprained her foot. Madame seemed to pity her, and wished to have a surgeon sent for immediately, but she, assuring her that there was nothing really serious in the accident, said: "My only regret, madame, is, that it will preclude my attendance on you, and I should have begged Mademoiselle de la Vallière to take my place with your royal highness, but——" seeing that Madame frowned, she added—"I have not done so."

"Why did you not do so?" inquired Madame.

"Because poor La Vallière seemed so happy to have her liberty for a whole evening and night too, that I did not feel courageous enough to ask her to take my place."

"What, is she so delighted as that?" inquired Madame, struck by these words.

"She is wild with delight; she, who is always so melancholy, was singing like a bird. Besides, your highness knows how much she detests going out, and also that her character has a spice of wildness in it."

"So!" thought Madame, "this extreme delight hardly seems natural to me."

"She has already made all her preparations for dining in her own room *tête-à-tête* with one of her favorite books. And then, as your highness has six other young ladies who would be delighted to accompany you, I did not make my proposal to La Vallière." Madame did not say a word in reply.

"Have I acted properly?" continued Montalais, with a slight fluttering of the heart, seeing the little success that seemed to attend the *ruse de guerre* which she had relied upon with so much confidence that she had not thought it even necessary to try and find another. "Does Madame approve of what I have done?" she continued.

Madame was reflecting that the king could very easily leave Saint-Germain during the night, and that, as it was only four leagues and a half from Paris to Saint-Germain, he might readily be in Paris in an hour's time. "Tell me," she said, "whether La Vallière, when she heard of your accident, offered at least to bear you company?"

"Oh! she does not yet know of my accident; but even did she know of it, I most certainly should not ask her to do anything that might interfere with her own plans. I think she wishes this evening to realize quietly by herself that amusement of the late king, when he said to M. de Cinq-Mars, 'Let us amuse ourselves by doing nothing, and making ourselves miserable.'"

Madame felt convinced that some mysterious love adventure lurked behind this strong desire for solitude. The secret *might* be Louis's return during the night; it could not be doubted any longer La Vallière had been informed of his intended return, and that was the reason for her delight at having to remain behind at the Palais-Royal. It was a plan settled and arranged beforehand.

"I will not be their dupe though," said Madame, and

she took a decisive step. "Mademoiselle de Montalais," she said, "will you have the goodness to inform your friend, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, that I am exceedingly sorry to disarrange her projects of solitude, but that instead of becoming *ennuyée* by remaining behind alone as she wished, she will be good enough to accompany us to Saint-Germain and get *ennuyée* there."

"Ah! poor La Vallière," said Montalais, compassionately, but with her heart throbbing with delight; "oh, madame! could there not be some means——"

"Enough," said Madame; "I desire it! I prefer Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc's society to that of any one else. Go, and send her to me, and take care of your foot."

Montalais did not wait for the order to be repeated; she returned to her room, almost forgetting to feign lameness, wrote an answer to Malicorne, and slipped it under the carpet. The answer simply said: "She shall." A Spartan could not have written more laconically.

"By this means," thought Madame, "I will look narrowly after all on the road; she shall sleep near me during the night, and his majesty must be very clever if he can exchange a single word with Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

La Vallière received the order to set off with the same indifferent gentleness with which she had received the order to play Cinderella. But, inwardly, her delight was extreme, and she looked upon this change in the princess's resolution as a consolation which Providence had sent her. With less penetration than Madame possessed, she attributed all to chance. While every one, with the exception of those in disgrace, of those who were ill, and those who were suffering from sprains, were being driven towards Saint-Germain, Malicorne smuggled his workman into the palace in one of M. de Saint-Aignan's carriages,

and led him into the room corresponding to La Vallière's. The man set to work with a will, tempted by the splendid reward which had been promised him. As the very best tools and implements had been selected from the reserve stock belonging to the engineers attached to the king's household—and among others, a saw with teeth so sharp and well tempered that it was able, under water even, to cut through oaken joists as hard as iron—the work in question advanced very rapidly, and a square portion of the ceiling, taken from between two of the joists, fell into the arms of the delighted Saint-Aignan, Malicorne, the workman, and a confidential valet, the latter being one brought into the world to see and hear everything, but to repeat nothing. In accordance with a new plan indicated by Malicorne, the opening was effected in an angle of the room—and for this reason. As there was no dressing-closet adjoining La Vallière's room, she had solicited, and had that very morning obtained, a large screen intended to serve as a partition. The screen that had been allotted her was perfectly sufficient to conceal the opening, which would, besides, be hidden by all the artifices skilled cabinet-makers have at their command. The opening having been made, the workman glided between the joists, and found himself in La Vallière's room. When there, he cut a square opening in the flooring, and out of the boards he manufactured a trap so accurately fitting into the opening, that the most practiced eye could hardly detect the necessary interstices made by its lines of juncture with the floor. Malicorne had provided for everything; a ring and a couple of hinges which had been bought for the purpose, were affixed to the trap-door; and a small circular staircase, packed in sections, had been bought ready made by the industrious Malicorne, who had paid two thousand francs for it. It was higher than was required, but the carpenter reduced the number of steps, and it was

found to suit exactly. This staircase, destined to receive so illustrious a burden, was merely fastened to the wall by a couple of iron clamps, and its base was fixed into the floor of the comte's room by two iron pegs screwed down tightly, so that the king, and all his cabinet councilors too, might pass up and down the staircase without any fear. Every blow of the hammer fell upon a thick pad or cushion, and the saw was not used until the handle had been wrapped in wool, and the blade steeped in oil. The noisiest part of the work, moreover, had taken place during the night and early in the morning, that is to say, when La Vallière and Madame were both absent. When, about two o'clock in the afternoon, the court returned to the Palais-Royal, La Vallière went up into her own room. Everything was in its proper place—not the smallest particle of sawdust, not the smallest chip, was left to bear witness to the violation of her domicile. Saint-Aignan, however, wishing to do his utmost in forwarding the work, had torn his fingers and his shirt too, and had expended no ordinary amount of perspiration in the king's service. The palms of his hands were covered with blisters, occasioned by his having held the ladder for Malicorne. He had moreover brought up, one by one, the seven pieces of the staircase, each consisting of two steps. In fact, we can safely assert, that if the king had seen him so ardently at work, his majesty would have sworn an eternal gratitude towards his faithful attendant. As Malicorne anticipated, the workman had completely finished the job in twenty-four hours; he received twenty-four louis, and left, overwhelmed with delight, for he had gained in one day as much as six months hard work would have procured him. No one had the slightest suspicion of what had taken place in the room under Mademoiselle de la Vallière's apartment. But in the evening of the second day, at the very moment La Val-

lière had just left Madame's circle and returned to her own room, she heard a slight creaking sound in one corner. Astonished, she looked to see whence it proceeded, and the noise began again. "Who is there?" she said, in a tone of alarm.

"It is I, Louise," replied the well-known voice of the king.

"You! you!" cried the young girl, who for a moment fancied herself under the influence of a dream. "But where? You, sire?"

"Here," replied the king, opening one of the folds of the screen, and appearing like a ghost at the end of the room.

La Vallière uttered a loud cry, and fell trembling into an arm-chair, as the king advanced respectfully towards her.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE APPARITION.

La Vallière very soon recovered from her surprise, for, owing to his respectful bearing, the king inspired her with more confidence by his presence than his sudden appearance had deprived her of. But, as he noticed that that which made La Vallière most uneasy was the means by which he had effected an entrance into her room, he explained to her the system of the staircase concealed by the screen, and strongly disavowed the notion of his being a supernatural appearance.

"Oh, sire!" said La Vallière, shaking her fair head with a most engaging smile, "present or absent, you do not appear to my mind more at one time than at another."

"Which means, Louise——"

"Oh, what you know so well, sire; that there is not one moment in which the poor girl whose secret you surprised at Fontainebleau, and whom you came to snatch from the foot of the cross itself, does not think of you."

"Louise, you overwhelm me with joy and happiness."

La Vallière smiled mournfully, and continued: "But, sire, have you reflected that your ingenious invention could not be of the slightest service to us?"

"Why so? Tell me,—I am waiting most anxiously?"

"Because this room may be subject to being searched at any moment of the day. Madame herself may, at any time, come here accidentally; my companions run in at any moment they please. To fasten the door on the inside, is to denounce myself as plainly as if I had written above, 'No admittance,—the king is within!' Even now, sire, at this very moment, there is nothing to prevent the door opening, and your majesty being seen here."

"In that case," said the king, laughingly, "I should indeed be taken for a phantom, for no one can tell in what way I came here. Besides, it is only spirits that can pass through brick walls, or floors and ceilings."

"Oh, sire, reflect for a moment how terrible the scandal would be! Nothing equal to it could ever have been previously said about the maids of honor, poor creatures! whom evil report, however, hardly ever spares."

"And your conclusion from all this, my dear Louise,—come, explain yourself."

"Alas! it is a hard thing to say—but your majesty must suppress staircase plots, surprises and all; for the evil consequences which would result from your being found here would be far greater than our happiness in seeing each other."

"Well, Louise," replied the king, tenderly, "instead of

removing this staircase by which I have ascended, there is a far more simple means, of which you have not thought."

"A means—another means!"

"Yes, another. Oh, you do not love me as I love you, Louise, since my invention is quicker than yours."

She looked at the king, who held out his hand to her, which she took and gently pressed between her own.

"You were saying," continued the king, "that I shall be detected coming here, where any one who pleases can enter."

"Stay, sire; at this very moment, even while you are speaking about it, I tremble with dread of your being discovered."

"But you would not be found out, Louise, if you were to descend the staircase which leads to the room underneath."

"Oh, sire! what do you say?" cried Louise, in alarm.

"You do not quite understand me, Louise, since you get offended at my very first word; first of all, do you know to whom the apartments underneath belong?"

"To M. de Guiche, sire, I believe."

"Not at all; they are M. de Saint-Aignan's."

"Are you sure?" cried La Vallière; and this exclamation which escaped from the young girl's joyous heart made the king's heart throb with delight.

"Yes, to Saint-Aignan, *our friend*," he said.

"But, sire," returned La Vallière, "I cannot visit M. de Saint-Aignan's rooms any more than I could M. de Guiche's. It is impossible—impossible."

"And yet, Louise, I should have thought that, under the safe conduct of the king, you would venture anything."

"Under the safe conduct of the king," she said with a look full of tenderness.

"You have faith in my word, I hope, Louise."

"Yes, sire, when you are not present; but when you are present,—when you speak to me,—when I look upon you, I have faith in nothing."

"What can possibly be done to reassure you?"

"It is scarcely respectful, I know, to doubt the king, but—for me—you are *not* the king."

"Thank heaven!—I, at least, hope so most devoutly, you see how anxiously I am trying to find or invent a means of removing all difficulty. Stay; would the presence of a third person reassure you?"

"The presence of M. de Saint-Aignan would, certainly."

"Really, Louise, you wound me by your suspicions."

Louise did not answer, she merely looked steadfastly at him with that clear, piercing gaze which penetrates the very heart, and said softly to herself, "Alas! alas! it is not you of whom I am afraid,—it is not you upon whom my doubts would fall."

"Well," said the king, sighing, "I agree; and M. de Saint-Aignan, who enjoys the inestimable privilege of reassuring you, shall always be present at our interviews, I promise you."

"You promise that, sire?"

"Upon my honor as a gentleman; and you, on your side——"

"Oh, wait, sire, that is not all yet; for such conversations ought, at least, to have a reasonable motive of some kind for M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Dear Louise, every shade of delicacy of feeling is yours, and my only study is to equal you on that point. It shall be just as you wish: therefore our conversations shall have a reasonable motive, and I have already hit upon one; so that from to-morrow, if you like——"

"To-morrow?"

"Do you mean that that is not soon enough?" ex-

claimed the king, caressing La Vallière's hand between his own.

At this moment the sound of steps was heard in the corridor.

"Sire! sire!" cried Le Vallière, "some one is coming; do you hear? Oh, fly! fly! I implore you."

The king made but one bound from the chair where he was sitting to his hiding-place behind the screen. He had barely time; for as he drew one of the folds before him, the handle of the door was turned, and Montalais appeared at the threshold. As a matter of course she entered quite naturally, and without any ceremony, for she knew perfectly well that to knock at the door beforehand would be showing a suspicion towards La Vallière which would be displeasing to her. She accordingly entered, and after a rapid glance round the room, in the brief course of which she observed two chairs very close to each other, she was so long in shutting the door, which seemed to be difficult to close, one can hardly tell how or why, that the king had ample time to raise the trap-door, and to descend again to Saint-Aignan's room.

"Louise," she said to her, "I want to talk to you, and seriously, too."

"Good heavens! my dear Aure, what is the matter now?"

"The matter is, that Madame suspects, *everything*."

"Explain yourself."

"Is there any occasion for us to enter into explanations, and do you not understand what I mean? Come, you must have noticed the fluctuations in Madame's humor during several days past; you must have noticed how she first kept you close beside her, then dismissed you, and then sent for you again."

"Yes, I have noticed it, of course."

"Well, it seems that Madame has now succeeded in

obtaining sufficient information, for she has now gone straight to the point, as there is nothing further left in France to withstand the torrent which sweeps away all obstacles before it; you know what I mean by the torrent?"

La Vallière hid her face in her hands.

"I mean," continued Montalais, pitilessly, "that torrent which burst through the gates of the Carmelites of Chaillot, and overthrew all the prejudices of the court, as well at Fontainebleau as at Paris."

"Alas! alas!" murmured La Vallière, her face still covered by her hands, and her tears streaming through her fingers.

"Oh, don't distress yourself in that manner, for you have only heard half of your troubles."

"In Heaven's name," exclaimed the young girl, in great anxiety, "what is the matter?"

"Well, then, this is how the matter stands; Madame, who can no longer rely upon any further assistance in France; for she has, one after the other, made use of the two queens, of Monsieur, and the whole court, too, now bethinks herself of a certain person who has certain pretended rights over you."

La Vallière became as white as a marble statue.

"This person," continued Montalais, "is not in Paris at this moment; but, if I am not mistaken, is, just now, in England."

"Yes, yes," breathed La Vallière, almost overwhelmed with terror.

"And is to be found, I think, at the court of Charles II.; am I right?"

"Yes."

"Well, this evening a letter has been dispatched by Madame to Saint James's, with directions for the courier to go straight on to Hampton Court, which I believe is

one of the royal residences, situated about a dozen miles from London."

"Yes, well?"

"Well; as Madame writes regularly to London once a fortnight, and as the ordinary courier left for London not more than three days ago, I have been thinking that some serious circumstance alone could have induced her to write again so soon, for you know she is a very indolent correspondent."

"Yes."

"This letter has been written, therefore, something tells me so, at least, on your account."

"On my account?" repeated the unhappy girl, mechanically.

"And I, who saw the letter lying on Madame's desk before she sealed it, fancied I could read——"

"What did you fancy you could read?"

"I might possibly have been mistaken, though——"

"Tell me,—what was it?"

"The name of Bragelonne."

La Vallière rose hurriedly from her chair, a prey to the most painful agitation. "Montalais," she said, her voice broken by sobs, "all my smiling dreams of youth and innocence have fled already. I have nothing now to conceal, either from you or any one else. My life is exposed to every one's inspection, and can be opened like a book, in which all the world can read, from the king himself to the first passer-by. Aure, dearest Aure, what can I do—what will become of me?"

Montalais approached close to her, and said, "Consult your own heart, of course."

"Well; I do not love M. de Bragelonne; when I say I do not love him, understand that I love him as the most affectionate sister could love the best of brothers, but that is not what he requires, nor what I promised him."

"In fact, you love the king," said Montalais, "and that is a sufficiently good excuse."

"Yes, I do love the king," hoarsely murmured the young girl, "and I have paid dearly enough for pronouncing those words. And now, Montalais, tell me—what can you do either for me, or against me, in my present position."

"You must speak more clearly still."

"What am I to say, then?"

"And so you have nothing very particular to tell me?"

"No!" said Louise, in astonishment.

"Very good; and so all you have to ask me is my advice respecting M. Raoul?"

"Nothing else."

"It is a very delicate subject," replied Montalais.

"No, it is nothing of the kind. Ought I to marry him in order to keep the promise I made, or ought I to continue to listen to the king?"

"You have really placed me in a very difficult position," said Montalais, smiling; "you ask me if you ought to marry Raoul, whose friend I am, and whom I shall mortally offend in giving my opinion against him; and then, you ask me if you should cease to listen to the king, whose subject I am, and whom I should also offend if I were to advise you in a particular way. Ah, Louise, you seem to hold a difficult position at a very cheap rate."

"You have not understood me, Aure," said La Vallière, wounded by the slightly mocking tone of her companion; "if I were to marry M. de Bragelonne, I should be far from bestowing on him the happiness he deserves; but, for the same reason, if I listen to the king he would become the possessor of one indifferent in very many aspects, I admit, but one on whom his affection confers an appearance of value. What I ask you, then, is to tell me some means

of disengaging myself honorably either from the one or from the other; or rather, I ask you, from which side you think I can free myself most honorably."

"My dear Louise," replied Montalais, after a pause, "I am not one of the seven wise men of Greece, and I have no perfectly invariable rules of conduct to govern me; but, on the other hand, I have a little experience, and I can assure you that no woman ever asks for advice of the nature which you have just asked me, without being in a terrible state of embarrassment. Besides, you have made a solemn promise, which every principle of honor requires you to fulfil; if, therefore, you are embarrassed, in consequence of having undertaken such an engagement, it is not a stranger's advice (every one is a stranger to a heart full of love), it is not my advice, I repeat, that can extricate you from your embarrassment. I shall not give it you, therefore; and for a greater reason still—because, were I in your place, I should feel much more embarrassed after the advice than before it. All I can do is, to repeat what I have already told you; shall I assist you?"

"Yes, yes."

"Very well; that is all. Tell me in what way you wish me to help you; tell me for and against whom,—in this way we shall not make any blunders."

"But first of all," said La Vallière, pressing her companion's hand, "for whom or against whom do you decide?"

"For you, if you are really and truly my friend."

"Are you not Madame's confidante?"

"A greater reason for being of service to you; if I were not to know what is going on in that direction I should not be of any service at all, and consequently you would not obtain any advantage from my acquaintance. Friendships live and thrive upon a system of reciprocal benefits."

"The result is, then, that you will remain at the same time Madame's friend also?"

"Evidently. Do you complain of that?"

"I hardly know," sighed La Vallière, thoughtfully, for this cynical frankness appeared to her an offense both to the woman and the friend.

"All well and good, then," said Montalais, "for if you did, you would be very foolish."

"You wish to serve me, then?"

"Devotedly—if you will serve me in return."

"One would almost say that you do not know my heart," said La Vallière, looking at Montalais with her eyes wide open.

"Why, the fact is, that since we have belonged to the court, my dear Louise, we are very much changed."

"In what way?"

"It is very simple. Were you the second Queen of France yonder, at Blois?"

La Vallière hung down her head, and began to weep. Montalais looked at her in an indefinable manner, and murmured "Poor girl!" and then, adding "Poor king!" she kissed Louise on the forehead, and returned to her apartment, where Malicorne was waiting for her.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PORTRAIT.

In that malady which is termed love the paroxysms succeed each other at intervals, ever accelerating from the moment the disease declares itself. By and by, the paroxysms are less frequent, in proportion as the cure approaches. This being laid down as a general axiom, and

as the leading article of a particular chapter, we will now proceed with our recital. The next day, the day fixed by the king for the first conversation in Saint-Aignan's room, La Vallière, on opening one of the folds of the screen, found upon the floor a letter in the king's handwriting. The letter had been passed, through a slit in the floor, from the lower apartment to her own. No indiscreet hand or curious gaze could have brought or did bring this simple paper. This, too, was one of Malicorne's ideas. Having seen how very serviceable Saint-Aignan would become to the king on account of his apartment, he did not wish that the courtier should become still more indispensable as a messenger, and so he had, on his own private account, reserved this last post for himself. La Vallière most eagerly read the letter, which fixed two o'clock that same afternoon for the rendezvous, and which indicated the way of raising the trap-door which was constructed out of the flooring. "Make yourself look as beautiful as you can," added the postscript of the letter, words which astonished the young girl, but at the same time reassured her.

The hours passed away very slowly, but the time fixed, however, arrived at last. As punctual as the priestess Hero, Louise lifted up the trap-door at the last stroke of the hour of two, and found the king on the steps, waiting for her with the greatest respect, in order to give her his hand to descend. The delicacy and deference shown in this attention affected her very powerfully. At the foot of the staircase the two lovers found the comte, who, with a smile and a low reverence distinguished by the best taste, expressed his thanks to La Vallière for the honor she conferred upon him. Then turning toward the king, he said,—

"Sire, our man is here." La Vallière looked at the king with some uneasiness.

"Mademoiselle," said the king, "if I have begged you to do me the honor of coming down here, it was from an interested motive. I have procured a most admirable portrait painter, who is celebrated for the fidelity of his likenesses, and I wish you to be kind enough to authorize him to paint yours. Besides, if you positively wish it, the portrait shall remain in your own possession." La Vallière blushed. "You see," said the king to her, "we shall not be three as you wished, but four instead. And, so long as we are not alone, there can be as many present as you please." La Vallière gently pressed her royal lover's hand.

"Shall we pass into the next room, sire," said Saint-Aignan, opening the door to let his guests precede him. The king walked behind La Vallière, and fixed his eyes lingeringly and passionately upon that neck as white as snow, upon which her long fair ringlets fell in heavy masses. La Vallière was dressed in a thick silk robe of pearl gray color, with a tinge of rose, with jet ornaments, which displayed to greater effect the dazzling purity of her skin, holding in her slender and transparent hands a bouquet of heartsease, Bengal roses, and clematis, surrounded with leaves of the tenderest green, above which uprose, like a tiny goblet spilling magic influence a Haarlem tulip of gray and violet tints, of a pure and beautiful species, which had cost the gardener five years' toil of combinations and the king five thousand francs. Louis had placed this bouquet in La Vallière's hand as he saluted her. In the room, the door of which Saint-Aignan had just opened, a young man was standing, dressed in a purple velvet jacket, with beautiful black eyes and long brown hair. It was the painter; his canvas was quite ready, and his palette prepared for use.

He bowed to La Vallière with the grave curiosity of

an artist who is studying his model, saluted the king discreetly, as if he did not recognize him, and as he would, consequently, have saluted any other gentleman. Then, leading Mademoiselle de la Vallière to the seat he had arranged for her, he begged her to sit down.

The young girl assumed an attitude graceful and unrestrained, her hands occupied and her limbs reclining on cushions; and in order that her gaze might not assume a vague or affected expression, the painter begged her to choose some kind of occupation, so as to engage her attention; whereupon Louis XIV., smiling, sat down on the cushions at La Vallière's feet; so that she, in the reclining posture she had assumed, leaning back in the arm-chair, holding her flowers in her hand, and he, with his eyes raised toward her and fixed devouringly on her face—they, both together, formed so charming a group, that the artist contemplated it with professional delight, while on his side, Saint-Aignan regarded them with feelings of envy. The painter sketched rapidly; and very soon, beneath the earliest touches of the brush, there started into life, out of the gray background, the gentle, poetry-breathing face, with its soft calm eyes and delicately-tinted cheeks, enframed in the masses of hair which fell about her neck. The lovers, however, spoke but little, and looked at each other a great deal; sometimes their eyes became so languishing in their gaze, that the painter was obliged to interrupt his work in order to avoid representing an Erycina instead of a La Vallière. It was on such occasions that Saint-Aignan came to the rescue, and recited verses, or repeated one of those little tales such as Patru related, and Tallemant des Reaux wrote so cleverly. Or, it might be that La Vallière was fatigued, and the sitting was, therefore, suspended for awhile; and, immediately, a tray of precious porcelain laden with the most beautiful fruits which could be obtained, and rich wines

distilling their bright colors in silver goblets, beautifully chased, served as accessories to the picture.

Louis was intoxicated with love, La Vallière with happiness, Saint-Aignan with ambition, and the painter was storing up recollections for his old age. Two hours passed away in this manner, and four o'clock having struck, La Vallière rose, and made a sign to the king. Louis also rose, approached the picture, and addressed a few flattering remarks to the painter. Saint-Aignan also praised the picture, which, as he pretended, was already beginning to assume an accurate resemblance. La Vallière in her turn, blushingly thanked the painter and passed into the next room, where the king followed her, after having previously summoned Saint-Aignan.

"Will you not come to-morrow?" he said to La Vallière.

"Oh! sire, pray think that some one will be sure to come to my room, and will not find me there."

"Well!"

"What will become of me in that case?"

"You are very apprehensive, Louise."

"But at all events, suppose Madame were to send for me."

"Oh!" replied the king, "will the day never come when you yourself will tell me to brave everything, so that I may not have to leave you again."

"On that day, sire, I shall be quite out of my mind, and you must not believe me."

"To-morrow, Louise."

La Vallière sighed, but, without the courage to oppose her royal lover's wish, she repeated, "To-morrow, then, since you desire it, sire," and with these words she ran lightly up the stairs, and disappeared from her lover's gaze.

"Well, sire?" inquired Saint-Aignan, when she had left.

"Well, Saint-Aignan; yesterday I thought myself the happiest of men."

"And does your majesty, then, regard yourself to-day," said the comte, smiling, "as the unhappiest of men?"

"No; but my love for her is an unquenchable thirst; in vain do I drink, in vain do I swallow the drops of water which your industry procures for me; the more I drink, the more unquenchable it becomes."

"Sire, that is in some degree your own fault, and your majesty alone has made the position such as it is."

"You are right."

"In that case, therefore, the means to be happy, is to fancy yourself satisfied, and to wait."

"Wait! you know that word, then?"

"There, there, sire—do not despair; I have already been at work on your behalf—I have still other resources in store." The king shook his head in a despairing manner.

"What, sire! have you not been satisfied hitherto?"

"Oh! yes, indeed yes, my dear Saint-Aignan; but invent, for Heaven's sake, invent some further project yet."

"Sire, I undertake to do my best, and that is all that any one can do."

The king wished to see the portrait again, as he was unable to see the original. He pointed out several alterations to the painter and left the room, and then Saint-Aignan dismissed the artist. The easel, paints, and painter himself, had scarcely gone, when Malicorne showed his head in the doorway. He was received by Saint-Aignan with open arms, but still with a little sadness, for the cloud which had passed across the royal sun, veiled, in its turn, the faithful satellite, and Malicorne at a glance perceived the melancholy that brooded on Saint-Aignan's face.

"Oh, monsieur le comte," he said, "how sad you seem!"

"And good reason too, my dear Monsieur Malicorne. Will you believe that the king is still dissatisfied?"

"With his staircase, do you mean?"

"Oh, no; on the contrary, he is delighted with the staircase."

"The decoration of the apartments, I suppose, don't please him."

"Oh! he has not even thought of that. No, indeed, it seems that what has dissatisfied the king——"

"I will tell you, monsieur le comte,—he is dissatisfied at finding himself the fourth person at a rendezvous of this kind. How is it possible you could not have guessed that?"

"Why, how is it likely I could have done so, dear M. Malicorne, when I followed the king's instructions to the very letter?"

"Did his majesty really insist on your being present?"

"Positively."

"And also required that the painter whom I met downstairs just now, should be here, too?"

"He insisted upon it."

"In that case, I can easily understand why his majesty is dissatisfied."

"What! dissatisfied that I have so punctually and so literally obeyed his orders? I don't understand you."

Malicorne began to scratch his ear, as he asked, "What time did the king fix for the rendezvous in your apartments?"

"Two o'clock."

"And you were waiting for the king?"

"Ever since half-past one; it would have been a fine thing, indeed, to have been unpunctual with his majesty."

Malicorne, notwithstanding his respect for Saint-Aignan, could not help smiling, "And the painter," he said, "did the king wish him to be here at two o'clock, also?"

"No; but I had him waiting here from midday. Far better, you know, for a painter to be kept waiting a couple of hours, than the king a single minute."

Malicorne began to laugh aloud. "Come, dear Monsieur Malicorne," said Saint-Aignan, "laugh less at me, and speak a little more freely, I beg."

"Well, then, monsieur le comte, if you wish the king to be a little more satisfied the next time he comes——"

"'*Ventre saint-gris!*' as his grandfather used to say; of course I wish it."

"Well, all you have to do is, when the king comes to-morrow, to be obliged to go away on a most pressing matter of business, which cannot possibly be postponed, and stay away for twenty minutes."

"What! leave the king alone for twenty minutes?" cried Saint-Aignan, in alarm.

"Very well, do as you like; don't pay any attention to what I say," said Malicorne, moving towards the door.

"Nay, nay, dear Monsieur Malicorne; on the contrary, go on—I begin to understand you. But the painter——"

"Oh! the painter must be half an hour late."

"Half an hour—do you really think so?"

"Yes, I do, decidedly."

"Very well, then, I will do as you tell me."

"And my opinion is, that you will be doing perfectly right. Will you allow me to call upon you for the latest news to-morrow?"

"Of course."

"I have the honor to be your most respectful servant, M. de Saint-Aignan," said Malicorne, bowing profoundly and retiring from the room backwards.

"There is no doubt that fellow has more invention than I have," said Saint-Aignan, as if compelled by his conviction to admit it.

CHAPTER XV.

HAMPTON COURT.

The revelation we have witnessed, that Montalais made to La Vallière, in a preceding chapter, very naturally makes us return to the principal hero of this tale, a poor wandering knight, roving about at the king's caprice. If our readers will be good enough to follow us, we will, in his company, cross that strait, more stormy than the Euripus, which separates Calais from Dover; we will speed across that green and fertile country, with its numerous little streams; through Maidstone, and many other villages and towns, each prettier than the other; and, finally, arrive at London. From thence, like blood-hounds following a track, after having ascertained that Raoul had made his first stay at Whitehall, his second at St. James's, and having learned that he had been warmly received by Monk, and introduced to the best society of Charles II.'s court, we will follow him to one of Charles II.'s summer residences, near the lively little village of Kingston, at Hampton Court, situated on the Thames. The river is not, at that spot, the boastful highway which bears upon its broad bosom its thousands of travellers; nor are its waters black and troubled as those of Cocytus, as it boastfully asserts, "I, too, am cousin of old ocean." No, at Hampton Court it is a soft and murmuring stream, with moss-fringed banks, reflecting, in its broad mirror, the willows and beeches which ornament its sides, and on which may occasionally be seen a light bark indolent-

ly running among the tall reeds, in a little creek formed of alders and forget-me-nots. The surrounding country on all sides smiled in happiness and wealth; the brick cottages, from whose chimneys the blue smoke was slowly ascending in wreaths, peeped forth from the belts of green holly which environed them; children dressed in red frocks appeared and disappeared amidst the high grass, like poppies bowed by the gentle breath of the passing breeze. The sheep, ruminating with half-closed eyes, lay lazily about under the shadow of the stunted aspens, while, far and near, the kingfishers, plumed with emerald and gold, skimmed swiftly along the surface of the water, like a magic ball heedlessly touching, as he passed, the line of his brother angler, who sat watching in his boat the fish as they rose to the surface of the sparkling stream. High above this paradise of dark shadows and soft light, rose the palace of Hampton Court, built by Wolsey—a residence the haughty cardinal had been obliged, timid courtier that he was, to offer to his master, Henry VIII., who had glowered with envy and cupidity at the magnificent new home. Hampton Court, with its brick walls, its large windows, its handsome iron gates, as well as its curious bell turrets, its retired covered walks, and interior fountains, like those of the Alhambra, was a perfect bower of roses, jasmine, and clematis. Every sense, sight and smell particularly, was gratified, and the reception-rooms formed a very charming frame-work for the pictures of love which Charles II. unrolled among the voluptuous paintings of Titian, of Pordenone and of Vandyck; the same Charles whose father's portrait —the martyr king—was hanging in his gallery, and who could show upon the wainscots of the various apartments the holes made by the balls of the puritanical followers of Cromwell, on the 24th August, 1648, at the time they had brought Charles I. prisoner to Hampton Court. There

it was that the king, intoxicated with pleasure and adventure, held his court—he who, a poet in feeling, thought himself justified in redeeming, by a whole day of voluptuousness, every minute which had been formerly passed in anguish and misery. It was not the soft green sward of Hampton Court—so soft, that it almost resembled the richest velvet in the thickness of its texture—nor was it the beds of flowers, with their variegated hues which encircled the foot of every tree, with rose-trees many feet in height, embracing most lovingly their trunks—nor even the enormous lime-trees, whose branches swept the earth like willows, offering a ready concealment for love or reflection beneath the shade of their foliage—it was none of these things for which Charles II. loved his palace of Hampton Court. Perhaps it might have been that beautiful sheet of water, which the cool breeze rippled like the wavy undulations of Cleopatra's hair, waters bedecked with cresses and white water-lilies, whose chaste bulbs which, coyly unfolding themselves beneath the sun's warm rays, reveal the golden germs which lie concealed within their milky petals—murmuring waters, on the bosom of which black swans majestically floated, and the graceful water-fowl, with their tender broods covered with silken down, darted restlessly in every direction, in pursuit of the insects among the reeds, or the frogs in their mossy retreats. Perhaps it might have been the enormous hollies, with their dark and tender green foliage; or the bridges uniting the banks of the canals in their embrace; or the fawns browsing in the endless avenues of the park; or the innumerable birds that hopped about the gardens, or flew from branch to branch, amidst the emerald foliage.

It might well have been any of these charms—for Hampton Court had them all; and possessed, too, almost forests of white roses, which climbed and trailed along

the lofty trellises, showering down upon the ground their snowy leaves rich with soft perfumery. But, no, what Charles II. most loved in Hampton Court were the charming figures who, when mid-day was past, flitted to and fro along the broad terraces of the gardens; like Louis XIV., he had had their wealth of beauties painted for his gallery by one of the great artists of the period—an artist who well knew the secret of transferring to canvas the rays of light which escaped from beaming eyes heavy laden with love and love's delights.

The day of our arrival at Hampton Court is almost as clear and bright as a summer's day in France; the atmosphere is heavy with the delicious perfume of geraniums, sweet-peas, syringas, and heliotrope scattered in profusion around. It is past midday, and the king, having dined after his return from hunting, paid a visit to Lady Castlemaine, the lady who was reputed at the time to hold his heart in bondage; and, this proof of his devotion discharged, he was readily permitted to pursue his infidelities until evening arrived. Love and amusement ruled the entire court; it was the period when ladies would seriously interrogate their ruder companions as to their opinions upon a foot more or less captivating, according to whether it wore a pink or lilac silk-stocking—for it was the period when Charles II. had declared that there was no hope of safety for a woman who wore green silk stockings, because Miss Lucy Stewart wore them of that color. While the king is endeavoring in all directions to inculcate others with his preferences on this point, we will ourselves bend our steps toward an avenue of beech trees opposite the terrace, and listen to the conversation of a young girl in a dark-colored dress, who is walking with another of about her own age dressed in blue. They crossed a beautiful lawn, from the center of which sprang a fountain, with the figure of a siren executed in bronze,

and strolled on, talking as they went, towards the terrace, along which, looking out upon the park and interspersed at frequent intervals, were erected summer-houses, diverse in form and ornament; these summer-houses were nearly all occupied; the two young women passed on, the one blushing deeply, while the other seemed dreamily silent. At last, having reached the end of the terrace which looks on the river, and finding there a cool retreat, they sat down close to each other.

"Where are we going?" said the younger to her companion.

"My dear, we are going where you yourself led the way."

"I?"

"Yes, you; to the extremity of the palace, towards that seat yonder, where the young Frenchman is seated, wasting his time in sighs and lamentations."

Miss Mary Grafton hurriedly said, "No, no; I am not going there."

"Why not?"

"Let us go back, Lucy."

"Nay, on the contrary, let us go on, and have an explanation."

"What about?"

"About how it happens that the Vicomte de Bragelonne always accompanies you in all your walks, as you invariably accompany him in his."

"And you conclude either that he loves me, or that I love him?"

"Why not?—he is a most agreeable and charming companion.—No one hears me I hope," said Lucy Stewart, as she turned round with a smile, which indicated, moreover, that her uneasiness on the subject was not extreme.

"No, no," said Mary, "the king is engaged in his summer-house with the Duke of Buckingham."

"Oh! *à propos* of the duke, Mary, it seems he has shown you great attention since his return from France; how is your own heart in that direction?"

Mary Grafton shrugged her shoulders with seeming indifference.

"Well, well, I will ask Bragelonne about it," said Stewart, laughing; "let us go and find him at once."

"What for?"

"I wish to speak to him."

"Not yet, one word before you do: come, come, you who know so many of the king's secrets, tell me why M. de Bragelonne is in England?"

"Because he was sent as an envoy from one sovereign to another."

"That may be; but, seriously, although politics do not much concern us, we know enough to be satisfied that M. de Bragelonne has no mission of any serious import here."

"Well, then, listen," said Stewart, with assumed gravity, "for your sake I am going to betray a state secret. Shall I tell you the nature of the letter which King Louis XIV. gave M. de Bragelonne for King Charles II.? I will; these are the very words, 'My brother, the bearer of this is a gentleman attached to my court, and the son of one whom you regard most warmly. Treat him kindly, I beg, and try and make him like England.'"

"Did it say that!"

"Word for word—or something very like it. I will not answer for the form, but the substance I am sure of."

"Well, and what conclusion do you, or rather what conclusion does the king, draw from that?"

"That the king of France has his own reasons for removing M. de Bragelonne, and for getting him married anywhere else than in France."

"So that, then, in consequence of this letter——"

"King Charles received M. de Bragelonne, as you are

aware, in the most distinguished and friendly manner; the handsomest apartments in Whitehall were allotted to him; and as you are the most valuable and precious person in his court, inasmuch as you have rejected his heart,—nay, do not blush,—he wished you to take a fancy to this Frenchman, and he was desirous to confer upon him so costly a prize. And this is the reason why you, the heiress of three hundred thousand pounds, a future duchess, so beautiful, so good, have been thrown in Bragelonne's way, in all the promenades and parties of pleasure to which he was invited. In fact it was a plot,—a kind of conspiracy."

Mary Grafton smiled with that charming expression which was habitual to her, and, pressing her companion's arm, said: "Thank the king, Lucy."

"Yes, yes, but the Duke of Buckingham is jealous, so take care."

Hardly had she pronounced these words, when the duke appeared from one of the pavilions on the terrace, and, approaching the two girls, with a smile, said, "You are mistaken, Miss Lucy; I am not jealous; and the proof, Miss Mary, is yonder, in the person of M. de Bragelonne himself, who ought to be the cause of my jealousy, but who is dreaming in pensive solitude. Poor fellow! Allow me to leave you for a few minutes, while I avail myself of those few minutes to converse with Miss Lucy Stewart, to whom I have something to say." And then, bowing to Lucy, he added, "Will you do me the honor to accept my hand, in order that I may lead you to the king, who is waiting for us?" With these words, Buckingham, still smiling, took Miss Stewart's hand, and led her away. When by herself, Mary Grafton, her head gently inclined towards her shoulder, with that indolent gracefulness of action which distinguishes young English girls, remained for a moment with her eyes fixed on

Raoul, but as if uncertain what to do. At last, after first blushing violently, and then turning deadly pale, thus revealing the internal combat which assailed her heart, she seemed to make up her mind to adopt a decided course, and with a tolerably firm step, advanced towards the seat on which Raoul was reclining, buried in the profoundest meditation, as we have already said. The sound of Miss Mary's steps, though they could be hardly heard upon the green sward, awakened Raoul from his musing attitude; he turned round, perceived the young girl, and walked forward to meet the companion whom his happy destiny had thrown in his way.

"I have been sent to you, monsieur," said Mary Grafton; "will you take care of me?"

"To whom is my gratitude due, for so great a happiness?" inquired Raoul.

"To the Duke of Buckingham," replied Mary, affecting a gayety she did not really feel.

"To the Duke of Buckingham, do you say?—he who so passionately seeks your charming society! Am I really to believe you are serious, mademoiselle?"

"The fact is, monsieur, you perceive, that everything seems to conspire to make us pass the best, or rather the longest, part of our days together. Yesterday, it was the king who desired me to beg you to seat yourself next to me at dinner; to-day, it is the Duke of Buckingham who begs me to come and place myself near you on this seat.

"And he has gone away in order to leave us together?" asked Raoul, with some embarrassment.

"Look yonder, at the turning of that path; he is just out of sight, with Miss Stewart. Are these polite attentions usual in France, monsieur le comte?"

"I cannot very precisely say what people do in France, mademoiselle, for I can hardly be called a Frenchman. I have resided in many countries, and almost always as a

soldier; and then, I have spent a long period of my life in the country. I am almost a savage."

"You do not like your residence in England, I fear."

"I scarcely know," said Raoul, inattentively, and sighing deeply, at the same time.

"What! you do not know?"

"Forgive me," said Raoul, shaking his head, and collecting his thoughts, "I did not hear you."

"Oh!" said the young girl, sighing in her turn, "how wrong the duke was to send me here!"

"Wrong!" said Raoul, "perhaps so; for I am but a rude, uncouth companion, and my society annoys you. The duke did, indeed, very wrong to send you."

"It is, precisely," replied Mary Grafton, in a clear, calm voice, "because your society does not annoy me, that the duke was wrong to send me to you."

It was now Raoul's turn to blush. "But," he resumed, "how happens it, that the Duke of Buckingham should send you to me; and why did you come? the duke loves you, and you love him."

"No," replied Mary, seriously, "the duke does not love me, because he is in love with the Duchesse D'Orleans; and, as for myself, I have no affection for the duke."

Raoul looked at the young lady with astonishment.

"Are you a friend of the Duke of Buckingham?" she inquired.

"The duke has honored me by calling me so ever since we met in France."

"You are simple acquaintances, then?"

"No; for the duke is the most intimate friend of one whom I regard as a brother."

"The Duc de Guiche?"

"Yes."

"He who is in love with Madame la Duchesse d'Orleans?"

"Oh! What is that you are saying?"

"And who loves him in return," continued the young girl, quietly.

Raoul bent down his head, and Mary Grafton, sighing deeply, continued, "They are very happy. But, leave me, Monsieur de Bragelonne, for the Duke of Buckingham has given you a very troublesome commission in offering me as a companion for your promenade. Your heart is elsewhere, and it is with the greatest difficulty you can be charitable enough to lend me your attention. Confess truly; it would be unfair on your part, vicomte, not to admit it."

"Madame, I do confess it."

She looked at him steadily. He was so noble and so handsome in his bearing, his eyes revealed so much gentleness, candor, and resolution, that the idea could not possibly enter her mind, that he was either rudely discourteous, or a mere simpleton. She only perceived clearly enough, that he loved another woman, and not herself, with the whole strength of his heart. "Ah! I now understand you," she said; "you have left your heart behind you in France." Raoul bowed. "The duke is aware of your affection?"

"No one knows it," replied Raoul.

"Why, therefore, do you tell me? Nay, answer me."

"I cannot."

"It is for me, then, to anticipate an explanation; you do not wish to tell me anything, because you are now convinced that I do not love the duke; because you see that I possibly might have loved you; because you are a gentleman of noble and delicate sentiments; and because, instead of accepting, even were it for the mere amusement of the passing hour, a hand which is almost pressed upon you; and, because instead of meeting my smiles with a smiling lip, you, who are young, have preferred to tell me

whom men have called beautiful, 'My heart is over the sea—it is in France.' For this, I thank you, Monsieur de Bragelonne; you are, indeed, a noble-hearted, noble-minded man, and I regard you all the more for it, as a friend only. And now let us cease speaking of myself, and talk of your own affairs. Forget that I have ever spoken to you of myself, tell me why you are sad, and why you have become more than usually so during these four past days?"

Raoul was deeply and sensibly moved by these sweet and melancholy tones; and as he could not, at the moment, find a word to say, the young girl again came to his assistance.

"Pity me," she said. "My mother was born in France, and I can truly affirm that I, too, am French in blood, as well as in feeling; but the leaden atmosphere and characteristic gloom of England seem to weigh upon me. Sometimes my dreams are golden-hued and full of wonderful enjoyments, when suddenly a mist rises and overspreads my fancy, blotting them out forever. Such, indeed, is the case at the present moment. Forgive me; I have now said enough on that subject; give me your hand, and relate your griefs to me as to a friend."

"You say you are French in heart and soul?"

"Yes, not only I repeat it, that my mother was French, but, further, as my father, a friend of King Charles I., was exiled in France, I, during the trial of that prince, as well as during the Protector's life, was brought up in Paris; at the Restoration of King Charles II., my poor father returned to England, where he died almost immediately afterwards; and then the king created me a duchess, and has dowered me according to my rank."

"Have you any relations in France?" Raoul inquired, with the deepest interest.

"I have a sister there, my senior by seven or eight

years, who was married in France, and was early left a widow; her name is Madame de Bellières. Do you know her?" she added, observing Raoul start suddenly.

"I have heard her name."

"She too, loves with her whole heart; and her last letters inform me she is happy, and her affection is, I conclude, returned. I told you, Monsieur de Bragelonne, that although I possess half of her nature, I do not share her happiness. But let us now speak of yourself; whom do you love in France?"

"A young girl, as soft and pure as a lily."

"But if she loves you, why are you sad?"

"I have been told that she has ceased to love me."

"You do not believe it, I trust?"

"He who wrote me so does not sign his letter."

"An anonymous denunciation! some treachery, be assured," said Miss Grafton.

"Stay," said Raoul, showing the young girl a letter which he had read over a thousand times; she took it from his hand and read as follows: —

"VICOMTE—You are perfectly right to amuse yourself yonder with the lovely faces of Charles II.'s court, for at Louis XIV.'s court, the castle in which your affections are enshrined is being besieged. Stay in London altogether, poor vicomte, or return without delay to Paris."

"There is no signature," said Miss Mary.

"None."

"Believe it not, then."

"Very good; but here is a second letter, from my friend De Guiche, which says, 'I am lying here wounded and ill. Return, Raoul, oh, return!'"

"What do you intend doing?" inquired the young girl, with a feeling of oppression at her heart.

"My intention, as soon as I received this letter, was immediately to take my leave of the king."

"When did you receive it?"

"The day before yesterday."

"It is dated Fontainebleau."

"A singular circumstance, do you not think, for the court is now at Paris? At all events, I would have set off; but when I mentioned my intention to the king, he began to laugh, and said to me, 'How comes it, monsieur l'ambassadeur, that you think of leaving? Has your sovereign recalled you?' I colored, naturally enough, for I was confused by the question; for the fact is, the king himself sent me here, and I have received no order to return."

Mary frowned in deep thought, and said, "Do you remain, then?"

"I must, mademoiselle."

"Do you ever receive any letters from her to whom you are so devoted?"

"Never."

"Never, do you say? Does she not love you, then?"

"At least, she has not written to me since my departure, although she used occasionally to write to me before. I trust she may have been prevented."

"Hush! the duke is coming."

And Buckingham at that moment was seen at the end of the walk, approaching towards them, alone and smiling; he advanced slowly, and held out his hands to them both. "Have you arrived at an understanding?" he said.

"About what?"

"About whatever might render you happy, dear Mary, and make Raoul less miserable."

"I do not understand you, my lord," said Raoul.

"That is my view of the subject, Miss Mary; do you

wish me to mention it before M. de Bragelonne?" he added, with a smile.

"If you mean," replied the young girl, haughtily, "that I was not indisposed to love M. de Bragelonne, that is useless, for I have told him so myself."

Buckingham reflected for a moment, and, without seeming in any way discountenanced, as she expected, he said: "My reason for leaving you with M. de Bragelonne was, that I thoroughly knew your refined delicacy of feeling, no less than the perfect loyalty of your mind and heart, and I hoped that M. de Bragelonne's cure might be effected by the hands of a physician such as you are."

"But, my lord, before you spoke of M. de Bragelonne's heart, you spoke to me of your own. Do you mean to effect the cure of two hearts at the same time?"

"Perfectly true, madame; but you will do me the justice to admit that I have long discontinued a useless pursuit, acknowledging that my own wound is incurable."

"My lord," said Mary, collecting herself for a moment before she spoke, "M. de Bragelonne is happy, for he loves and is beloved. He has no need of such a physician as I can be."

"M. de Bragelonne," said Buckingham, "is on the very eve of experiencing a serious misfortune, and he has greater need than ever of sympathy and affection."

"Explain yourself, my lord," inquired Raoul anxiously.

"No; gradually I will explain myself; but, if you desire it, I can tell Miss Grafton what you may not listen to yourself."

"My lord, you are putting me to the torture; you know something you wish to conceal from me?"

"I know that Miss Mary Grafton is the most charming object that a heart ill at ease could possibly meet with in its way through life."

"I have already told you that the Vicomte de Bragelonne loves elsewhere," said the young girl.

"He is wrong, then."

"Do you assume to know, my lord, that *I* am wrong?"

"Yes."

"Whom is it that he loves, then?" exclaimed the young girl.

"He loves a lady who is unworthy of him," said Buckingham, with that calm, collected manner peculiar to Englishmen.

Miss Grafton uttered a cry, which, together with the remark that Buckingham had that moment made, spread over De Bragelonne's features a deadly paleness, arising from the sudden surprise, and also from a vague fear of impending misfortune. "My lord," he exclaimed, "you have just pronounced words which compel me, without a moment's delay, to seek their explanation in Paris."

"You will remain here," said Buckingham, "because you have no right to leave; and no one has the right to quit the service of the king for that of any woman, even were she as worthy of being loved as Mary Grafton is."

"You will tell me all, then?"

"I will, on condition that you will remain."

"I will remain, if you will promise to speak openly and without reserve."

Thus far had their conversation proceeded, and Buckingham, in all probability, was on the point of revealing, not indeed all that had taken place, but at least all he was aware of, when one of the king's attendants appeared at the end of the terrace, and advanced towards the summer-house where the king was sitting with Lucy Stewart. A courier followed him, covered with dust from head to foot, and who seemed as if he had but a few moments before dismounted from his horse.

"The courier from France! Madame's courier!" exclaimed Raoul, recognizing the princess's livery; and while the attendant and the courier advanced towards the king, Buckingham and Miss Grafton exchanged a look full of intelligence with each other.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COURIER FROM MADAME.

Charles II. was busily engaged in proving, or in endeavoring to prove, to Miss Stewart that she was the only person for whom he cared at all, and consequently was avowing to her an affection similar to that which his ancestor Henry IV. had entertained for Gabrielle. Unfortunately for Charles II. he had hit upon an unlucky day, the very day Miss Stewart had taken it into her head to make him jealous, and therefore, instead of being touched by his offer, as the king had hoped, she laughed heartily.

"Oh! sire, sire," she cried, laughing all the while; "if I were to be unfortunate enough to ask you for a proof of the affection you profess, how easy it would be to see that you are telling a falsehood."

"Nay, listen to me," said Charles, "you know my cartoons by Raphael; you know whether I care for them or not; the whole world envies me their possession, as you well know also; my father commissioned Vandyck to purchase them. Would you like me to send them to your house this very day?"

"Oh! no," replied the young girl; "pray keep them yourself, sire; my house is far too small to accommodate such visitors."

"In that case you shall have Hampton Court to put the cartoons in."

"Be less generous, sire, and learn to love a little while longer, that is all I have to ask you."

"I shall never cease to love you; is not that enough?"

"You are smiling, sire."

"Do you wish me to weep?"

"No; but I should like to see you a little more melancholy."

"Thank Heaven, I have been so long enough; fourteen years of exile, poverty, and misery, I think I may well regard it as a debt discharged; beside, melancholy makes people look so plain."

"Far from that—for look at the young Frenchman."

"What! the Vicomte de Bragelonne? are you smitten too? By Heaven, they will all grow mad over him one after the other; but he, on the contrary, has a reason for being melancholy."

"Why so?"

"Oh, indeed! you wish me to betray state secrets, do you?"

"If I wish it, you must do so, for you told me you were quite ready to do everything I wished."

"Well, then, he is bored in his own country. Does that satisfy you?"

"Bored?"

"Yes, a proof that he is a simpleton; I allow him to fall in love with Miss Mary Grafton, and he feels bored. Can you believe it?"

"Very good; it seems then, that if you were to find Miss Lucy Stewart indifferent to you, you would console yourself by falling in love with Miss Mary Grafton."

"I don't say that; in the first place, you know that Mary Grafton does not care for me; besides, a man can only console himself for a lost affection by the discovery of a

new one. Again, however, I repeat, the question is not of myself, but of that young man. One might almost be tempted to call the girl he has left behind him a Helen—a Helen before the little ceremony she went through with Paris, of course."

"He has left some one, then?"

"That is to say, some one has left *him*."

"Poor fellow! so much the worse!"

"What do you mean by 'so much the worse?'"

"Why not? why did he leave?"

"Do you think it was of his own wish or will that he left?"

"Was he obliged to leave, then?"

"He left Paris under orders, my dear Stewart; and prepare to be surprised—by express orders of the king."

"Ah! I begin to see, now."

"At least say nothing at all about it."

"You know very well that I am just as discreet as anybody else. And so the king sent him away?"

"Yes."

"And during his absence he takes his sweetheart from him?"

"Yes; and, will you believe it? the silly fellow, instead of thanking the king, is making himself miserable."

"What! thank the king for depriving him of the woman he loves! Really, sire, yours is a most ungallant speech."

"But, pray understand me. If she whom the king had run off with was either a Miss Grafton or a Miss Stewart, I should be of his opinion; nay, I should even think him not half wretched enough; but she is a little, thin, lame thing. Deuce take such fidelity as that! Surely, one can hardly understand how a man can refuse a girl who is rich for one who is poverty itself—a girl who loves him for one who deceives and betrays him."

"Do you think that Mary seriously wishes to please the vicomte, sire?"

"I do, indeed."

"Very good! the vicomte will settle down in England, for Mary has a clear head, and when she fixes her mind upon anything, she does so thoroughly."

"Take care, my dear Miss Stewart; if the vicomte has any idea of adopting our country, he has not long to do so, for it was only the day before yesterday that he again asked me for permission to leave."

"Which you refused him, I suppose?"

"I should think so, indeed; my royal brother is far too anxious for his absence; and, for myself, my *amour-propre* is enlisted on his side, for I will never have it said that I had held out as a bait to this young man the noblest and gentlest creature in England——"

"You are very gallant, sire," said Miss Stewart, with a pretty pout.

"I do not allude to Miss Stewart, for she is worthy a king's devotion; and since she has captivated me I trust that no one else will be caught by her; I say, therefore, finally, that the attention I have shown this young man will not have been thrown away; he will stay with us here, will marry here, or I am very much mistaken."

"And I hope that when he is once married and settled, instead of being angry with your majesty, he will be grateful to you, for every one tries his utmost to please him; even the Duke of Buckingham, whose brilliancy, which is incredible, seems to pale before that of this young Frenchman."

"Including Miss Stewart even, who calls him the most finished gentleman she ever saw."

"Stay, sire; you have spoken quite enough, and quite highly enough, of Miss Grafton, to overlook what I may have said about De Bragelonne. But, by the by, sire,

your kindness for some time past astonishes me: you think of those who are absent, you forgive those who have done you a wrong, in fact, you are, as nearly as possible, perfect. How does it happen——"

"It is because you allow yourself to be loved," he said, beginning to laugh.

"Oh! there must be some other reason."

"Well, I am doing all I can to oblige my brother, Louis XIV."

"Nay, I must have another reason."

"Well, then, the true motive is that Buckingham strongly recommended the young man to me, saying: 'Sire, I begin by yielding up all claim to Miss Grafton; I pray you follow my example.'"

"The duke is, indeed, a true gentleman."

"Oh! of course, of course; it is Buckingham's turn now, I suppose, to turn *your* head. You seem determined to cross me in everything to-day."

At this moment some one rapped at the door.

"Who is it who presumes to interrupt us?" exclaimed Charles, impatiently.

"Really, sire, you are extremely vain with your 'who is it who presumes?' and in order to punish you for it——"

She went to the door and opened it.

"It is a courier from France," said Miss Stewart.

"A courier from France!" exclaimed Charles; "from my sister perhaps?"

"Yes, sire," said the usher, "a special messenger."

"Let him come in at once," said Charles.

"You have a letter for me," said the king to the courier as he entered, "from the Duchess of Orleans?"

"Yes, sire," replied the courier, "and so urgent in its nature that I have only been twenty-six hours in bring-

ing it to your majesty, and yet I lost three-quarters of an hour at Calais."

"Your zeal shall not be forgotten," said the king, as he opened the letter. When he had read it he burst out laughing, and exclaimed, "Upon my word, I am at a loss to understand anything about it." He then read the letter a second time, Miss Stewart assuming a manner marked by the greatest reserve, and doing her utmost to restrain her ardent curiosity.

"Francis," said the king to his valet, "see that this excellent fellow is well taken care of and sleeps soundly, and that on waking to-morrow morning he finds a purse of fifty sovereigns by his bedside."

"Sire!" said the courier, amazed.

"Begone, begone; my sister was perfectly right in desiring you to use the utmost diligence; the affair was most pressing." And he again began to laugh louder than ever. The courier, the valet, and Miss Stewart hardly knew what sort of countenance to assume. "Ah!" said the king, throwing himself back in his arm-chair; "when I think that you have knocked up—how many horses?"

"Two!"

"Two horses to bring this intelligence to me. That will do, you can leave us now."

The courier retired with the valet. Charles went to the window, which he opened, and leaning forward, called out,—"Duke! Buckingham! come here, there's a good fellow."

The duke hurried to him, in obedience to the summons; but when he reached the door, and perceived Miss Stewart, he hesitated to enter.

"Come in, and shut the door," said the king. The duke obeyed; and, perceiving in what an excellent humor the king was, he advanced, smiling, towards him. "Well,

my dear duke, how do you get on with your Frenchman?"

"Sire, I am in the most perfect state of utter despair about him."

"Why so?"

"Because charming Miss Grafton is willing to marry him, but he is unwilling."

"Why, he is a perfect Bœotian!" cried Miss Stewart. "Let him say either 'Yes,' or 'No,' and let the affair end."

"But," said Buckingham, seriously, "you know, or you ought to know, madame, that M. de Bragelonne is in love in another direction."

"In that case," said the king, coming to Miss Stewart's help, "nothing is easier; let him say 'No,' then."

"Very true; and I have proved to him he was wrong not to say 'Yes.'"

"You told him candidly, I suppose, that La Vallière was deceiving him?"

"Yes, without the slightest reserve; and, as soon as I had done so, he gave a start, as if he were going to clear the Channel at a bound."

"At all events," said Miss Stewart, "he has done something; and a very good thing too, upon my word."

"But," said Buckingham, "I stopped him; I have left him and Miss Mary in conversation together, and I sincerely trust that now he will not leave, as he seemed to have had an idea of doing."

"An idea of leaving England?" cried the king.

"I, at one moment, hardly thought that any human power could have prevented him; but Miss Mary's eyes are now bent fully on him, and he will remain."

"Well, that is the very thing which deceives you, Buckingham," said the king, with a peal of laughter; "the poor fellow is predestined."

"Predestined to what?"

"If it were to be simply deceived, that is nothing; but to look at him, it is a great deal."

"At a distance, and with Miss Grafton's aid, the blow will be warded off."

"Far from it, far from it; neither distance nor Miss Grafton's help will be of the slightest avail. Bragelonne will set off for Paris within an hour's time."

Buckingham started, and Miss Stewart opened her eyes very wide in astonishment.

"But, sire," said the duke, "your majesty knows that it is impossible."

"That is to say, my dear Buckingham, that it is impossible until it happens."

"Do not forget, sire, that the young man is a perfect lion, and that his wrath is terrible."

"I don't deny it, my dear duke."

"And that if he sees that his misfortune is certain, so much the worse for the author of it."

"I don't deny it; but what the deuce am I to do?"

"Were it the king himself," cried Buckingham, "I would not answer for him."

"Oh, the king has his musketeers to take care of him," said Charles, quietly; "I know that perfectly well, for I was kept dancing attendance in his antechamber at Blois. He has M. d'Artagnan, and what better guardian could the king have than M. d'Artagnan? I should make myself perfectly easy with twenty storms of passion, such as Bragelonne might display, if I had four guardians like D'Artagnan."

"But I entreat your majesty, who is so good and kind, to reflect a little."

"Stay," said Charles II., presenting the letter to the duke, "read, and answer yourself what you would do in my place."

Buckingham slowly took hold of Madame's letter, and trembling with emotion, read the following words:

"For your own sake, for mine, for the honor and safety of every one, send M. de Bragelonne back to France immediately. Your devoted sister, HENRIETTA."

"Well, Villiers, what do you say?"

"Really, sire, I have nothing to say," replied the duke, stupefied.

"Nay, would you, of all persons," said the king, artfully, "advise me not to listen to my sister when she writes so urgently?"

"Oh, no, no, sire; and yet——"

"You have not read the postscript, Villiers; it is under the fold of the letter, and escaped me at first; read it." And as the duke turned down a fold of the letter, he read:

"A thousand kind remembrances to those who love me."

The duke's head sank gradually on his breast; the paper trembled in his fingers, as if it had been changed to lead. The king paused for a moment, and, seeing that Buckingham did not speak, "He must follow his destiny, as we ours," continued the king; "every man has his share of grief in this world; I have had my own,—I have had that of others who belong to me,—and have thus had a double weight of woe to endure!—But the deuce take all my cares now! Go, and bring our friend here, Villiers."

The duke opened the trellised door of the summer-house, and pointing at Raoul and Mary, who were walking together side by side, said, "What a cruel blow, sire, for poor Miss Grafton!"

"Nonsense; call him," said Charles II., knitting his black brows together, "every one seems to be sentimental

here. There, look at Miss Stewart, who is wiping her eyes,—now deuce take the French fellow!"

The duke called to Raoul, and taking Miss Grafton by the hand, he led her towards the king.

"Monsieur de Bragelonne," said Charles II., "did you not ask me the day before yesterday for permission to return to Paris?"

"Yes, sire," replied Raoul, greatly puzzled by this address.

"And I refused you, I think?"

"Yes, sire."

"For which you were angry with me?"

"No, sire; your majesty had no doubt excellent reasons for withholding it; for you are so wise and so good that everything you do is well done."

"I alleged, I believe, as a reason, that the king of France had not recalled you?"

"Yes, sire, that was the reason you assigned."

"Well, M. de Bragelonne, I have reflected over the matter since; if the king did not, in fact, fix your return, he begged me to render your sojourn in England as agreeable as possible; since, however, you ask my permission to return, it is because your longer residence in England is no longer agreeable to you."

"I do not say that, sire."

"No, but your request, at least," said the king, "signified that another place of residence would be more agreeable to you than this."

At this moment Raoul turned towards the door, against which Miss Grafton was leaning, pale and sorrow-stricken; her other hand was passed through the duke's arm.

"You do not reply," pursued Charles; "the proverb is plain enough, that 'silence gives consent.' Very good, Monsieur de Bragelonne; I am now in a position to satisfy you; whenever you please, therefore, you can leave for Paris, for which you have my authority."

"Sire!" exclaimed Raoul, while Mary stifled an exclamation of grief which rose to her lips, unconsciously pressing Buckingham's arm.

"You can be at Dover this evening," continued the king, "the tide serves at two o'clock in the morning."

Raoul, astounded, stammered out a few broken sentences, which equally answered the purpose both of thanks and of excuse.

"I therefore bid you adieu, Monsieur de Bragelonne, and wish you every sort of prosperity," said the king, rising; "you will confer a pleasure on me by keeping this diamond in remembrance of me; I had intended it as a marriage gift."

Miss Grafton felt her limbs almost giving way; and, as Raoul received the ring from the king's hand, he, too, felt his strength and courage failing him. He addressed a few respectful words to the king, a passing compliment to Miss Stewart, and looked for Buckingham to bid him adieu. The king profited by this moment to disappear. Raoul found the duke engaged in endeavoring to encourage Miss Grafton.

"Tell him to remain, I implore you!" said Buckingham to Mary.

"No, I will tell him to go," replied Miss Grafton, with returning animation; "I am not one of those women who have more pride than heart; if she whom he loves is in France, let him return thither and bless me for having advised him to go and seek his happiness there. If, on the contrary, she shall have ceased to love him, let him come back here again; I shall still love him, and his unhappiness will not have lessened him in my regard. In the arms of my house you will find that which Heaven has engraven on my heart—*Habenti parum, egenti cuncta.* 'To the rich is accorded little, to the poor everything.'"

"I do not believe, Bragelonne, that you will find yonder the equivalent of what you leave behind you here."

"I think, or at least I hope," said Raoul, with a gloomy air, "that she whom I love is worthy of my affection; but if it be true she is unworthy of me, as you have endeavored to make me believe, I will tear her image from my heart, duke, even if my heart breaks in the attempt."

Mary Grafton gazed upon him with an expression of the most indefinable pity, and Raoul returned her look with a sweet, sorrowful smile, saying, "Mademoiselle, the diamond which the king has given me was destined for you,—give me leave to offer it for your acceptance; if I marry in France, you will send it me back; if I do not marry, keep it." And he bowed and left her.

"What does he mean?" thought Buckingham, while Raoul pressed Mary's icy hand with marks of the most reverential respect.

Mary understood the look that Buckingham fixed upon her.

"If it were a wedding-ring, I would not accept it," she said.

"And yet you were willing to ask him to return to you."

"Oh! duke," cried the young girl in heart-broken accents, "a woman such as I am is never accepted as a consolation by a man like him."

"You do not think he will return, then?"

"Never," said Miss Grafton, in a choking voice.

"And I grieve to tell you, Mary, that he will find yonder his happiness destroyed, his mistress lost to him. His honor even has not escaped. What will be left him, then, Mary, equal to your affection? Answer, Mary, you who know yourself so well?"

Miss Grafton placed her white hand on Buckingham's arm, and, while Raoul was hurrying away with headlong

speed, she repeated in dying accents the line from Romeo and Juliet:

"*I must be gone and live, or stay and die.*"

As she finished the last word, Raoul disappeared. Miss Grafton returned to her own apartments, paler than death. Buckingham availed himself of the arrival of the courier, who had brought the letter to the king, to write to Madame and to the Comte de Guiche. The king had not been mistaken, for at two in the morning the tide was at full flood, and Raoul had embarked for France.

CHAPTER XVII.

SAINT-AIGNAN FOLLOWS MALICORNE'S ADVICE.

The king most assiduously followed the progress which was made in La Vallière's portrait; and did so with a care and attention arising as much from a desire that it should resemble her as from the wish that the painter should prolong the period of its completion as much as possible. It was amusing to observe him follow the artist's brush, awaiting the completion of a particular plan, or the result of a combination of colors, and suggesting various modifications to the painter, which the latter consented to adopt with the most respectful docility. And again, when the artist, following Malicorne's advice, was a little late in arriving, and when Saint-Aignan had been obliged to be absent for some time, it was interesting to observe, though no one witnessed them, those moments of silence full of deep expression, which united in one sigh two souls most disposed to understand each other, and who by no means objected to the quiet meditation they enjoyed together. The minutes flew rapidly by, as

if on wings, and as the king drew closer to Louise and bent his burning gaze upon her, a noise was suddenly heard in the anteroom. It was the artist, who had just arrived; Saint-Aignan, too, had returned, full of apologies; and the king began to talk and La Vallière to answer him very hurriedly, their eyes revealing to Saint-Aignan that they had enjoyed a century of happiness during his absence. In a word, Malicorne, philosopher that he was, though he knew it not, had learned how to inspire the king with an appetite in the midst of plenty, and with desire in the assurance of possession. La Vallière's fears of interruption had never been realized, and no one imagined she was absent from her apartment two or three hours every day; she pretended that her health was very uncertain; those who went to her room always knocked before entering, and Malicorne, the man of so many ingenious inventions, had constructed an acoustic piece of mechanism, by means of which La Vallière, when in Saint-Aignan's apartment, was always forewarned of any visits which were paid to the room she usually inhabited. In this manner, therefore, without leaving her own room, and having no *confidante*, she was able to return to her apartment, thus removing by her appearance, a little tardy perhaps, the suspicions of the most determined skeptics. Malicorne having asked Saint-Aignan the next morning what news he had to report, the latter was obliged to confess that the quarter of an hour's liberty had made the king in most excellent humor. "We must double the dose," replied Malicorne, "but by insensible degrees; wait until they seem to wish it."

They were so desirous for it, however, that on the evening of the fourth day, at the moment when the painter was packing up his painting implements, during Saint-Aignan's continued absence, Saint-Aignan on his return noticed upon La Vallière's face a shade of disappointment

and vexation, which she could not conceal. The king was less reserved, and exhibited his annoyance by a very significant shrug of the shoulders, at which La Vallière could not help blushing. "Very good!" thought Saint-Aignan to himself; "M. Malicorne will be delighted this evening;" as he, in fact, was, when it was reported to him.

"It is very evident," he remarked to the comte, "that Mademoiselle de la Vallière hoped that you would be at least ten minutes later."

"And the king that I should be half an hour later, dear Monsieur Malicorne."

"You would show but very indifferent devotion to the king," replied the latter, "if you were to refuse his majesty that half hour's satisfaction."

"But the painter," objected Saint-Aignan.

"*I* will take care of him," said Malicorne, "only I must study faces and circumstances a little before I act; those are my magical inventions, and contrivances; and while sorcerers are enabled by means of their astrolabe to take the altitude of the sun, moon, and stars, I am satisfied merely by looking into people's faces, in order to see if their eyes are encircled with dark lines, and if the mouth describes a convex or a concave arc."

And the cunning Malicorne had every opportunity of watching narrowly and closely, for the very same evening the king accompanied the queen to Madame's apartments, and made himself so remarked by his serious face and his deep sigh, and looked at La Vallière with such a languishing expression, that Malicorne said to Montalais during the evening: "To-morrow." And he went off to the painter's house in the street of the Jardin Saint-Paul to request him to postpone the next sitting for a couple of days. Saint-Aignan was not within, when La Vallière, who was now quite familiar with the lower story, lifted

up the trap-door and descended. The king, as usual, was waiting for her on the staircase, and held a bouquet in his hand; as soon as he saw her, he clasped her tenderly in his arms. La Vallière, much moved at the action, looked around the room, but as she saw the king was alone, she did not complain of it. They sat down, the king reclining near the cushions on which Louise was seated, with his head supported by her knees, placed there as in an asylum whence no one could banish him; he gazed ardently upon her, and as if the moment had arrived when nothing could interpose between their two hearts; she, too, gazed with similar passion upon him, and from her eyes, so softly pure, emanated a flame, whose rays first kindled and then inflamed the heart of the king, who, trembling with happiness as Louise's hand rested on his head, grew giddy from excess of joy, and momentarily awaited either the painter's or Saint-Aignan's return to break the sweet illusion. But the door remained closed, and neither Saint-Aignan nor the painter appeared, nor did the hangings even move. A deep mysterious silence reigned in the room—a silence which seemed to influence even the song-birds in their gilded prisons. The king, completely overcome, turned round his head and buried his burning lips in La Vallière's hands, who, herself faint, with excess of emotion, pressed her trembling hands against her lover's lips. Louis threw himself upon his knees, and as La Vallière did not move her head, the king's forehead being within reach of her lips, she furtively passed her lips across the perfumed locks which caressed her cheeks. The king seized her in his arms, and, unable to resist the temptation, they exchanged their first kiss—that burning kiss, which changes love into delirium. Suddenly, a noise upon the upper floor was heard, which had, in fact, continued, though it had remained unnoticed, for some time; it had at last aroused

La Vallière's attention, though but slowly so. As the noise, however, continued, as it forced itself upon the attention, and recalled the poor girl from her dreams of happiness to the sad realities of life, she rose in a state of utter bewilderment, though beautiful in her disorder, saying:

"Some one is waiting for me above. Louis, Louis, do you not hear?"

"Well! and am I not waiting for you, also?" said the king, with infinite tenderness of tone. "Let others henceforth wait for you."

But she gently shook her head, as she replied: "Happiness hidden....power concealed....my pride should be as silent as my heart."

The noise was again resumed.

"I hear Montalais's voice," she said and she hurried up the staircase; the king followed her, unable to let her leave his sight, and covering her hand with his kisses. "Yes, yes," repeated La Vallière, who had passed half-way through the opening. "Yes, it is Montalais who is calling me; something important must have happened."

"Go then, dearest love," said the king, "but return quickly."

"No, no, not to-day, sire! Adieu! adieu!" she said, as she stooped down once more to embrace her lover—and escaped. Montalais was, in fact, waiting for her, very pale and agitated.

"Quick, quick! *he* is coming," she said.

"Who—who is coming?"

"Raoul," murmured Montalais.

"It is I—I," said a joyous voice, upon the last steps of the grand staircase.

La Vallière uttered a terrible shriek, and threw herself back.

"I am here, dear Louise," said Raoul, running towards



"GO, THEN, DEAREST LOVE," SAID THE KING. "BUT RETURN QUICKLY"

her. "I knew but too well that you had not ceased to love me."

La Vallière with a gesture, partly of extreme terror, and partly as if invoking a blessing, attempted to speak, but could not articulate one word. "No, no!" she said, as she fell into Montalais's arms, murmuring, "Do not touch me, do not come near me."

Montalais made a sign to Raoul, who stood almost petrified at the door, and did not even attempt to advance another step into the room. Then, looking towards the side of the room where the screen was, she exclaimed: "Imprudent girl, she has not even closed the trap-door!"

And she advanced towards the corner of the room to close the screen, and also, behind the screen, the trap-door. But suddenly the king, who had heard Louise's exclamation, darted through the opening, and hurried forward to her assistance. He threw himself on his knees before her, as he overwhelmed Montalais with questions, who hardly knew where she was. At the moment, however, when the king threw himself on his knees, a cry of utter despair rang through the corridor accompanied by the sound of retreating footsteps. The king wished to see who had uttered the cry and whose were the footsteps he had heard; and it was in vain that Montalais sought to retain him, for Louis, quitting his hold of La Vallière, hurried towards the door, too late, however, for Raoul was already at a distance, and the king only beheld a shadow that quickly vanished in the silent corridor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TWO OLD FRIENDS.

Whilst every one at court was busily engaged with his own affairs, a man mysteriously took up his post behind the Place de Grève, in the house which we once saw besieged by D'Artagnan on the occasion of the *émeute*. The principal entrance of this house was in the Place Baudoyer; it was tolerably large, surrounded by gardens, inclosed in the Street Saint-Jean by the shops of toolmakers, which protected it from prying looks, and was walled in by a triple rampart of stone, noise, and verdure, like an embalmed mummy in its triple coffin. The man we have just alluded to walked along with a firm step, although he was no longer in his early prime. His dark cloak and long sword plainly revealed one who seemed in search of adventures; and, judging from his curling mustaches, his fine smooth skin, which could be seen beneath his *sombrero*, it would not have been difficult to pronounce that gallantry had not a little share in his adventures. In fact, hardly had the cavalier entered the house, when the clock struck eight; and ten minutes afterwards a lady, followed by a servant armed to the teeth, approached and knocked at the same door, which an old woman immediately opened for her. The lady raised her veil as she entered; though no longer beautiful or young, she was still active and of an imposing carriage. She concealed, beneath a rich toilette and the most exquisite taste, an age which Ninon de l'Enclos alone could have smiled at with impunity. Hardly had she reached the vestibule,

when the cavalier, whose features we have only roughly sketched, advanced towards her, holding out his hand.

"Good-day, my dear duchesse," he said.

"How do you do, my dear Aramis?" replied the duchesse.

He led her to a most elegantly furnished apartment, on whose high windows were reflected the expiring rays of the setting sun, which filtered gaudily through the dark green needles of the adjacent firs. They sat down side by side. Neither of them thought of asking for additional light in the room, and they buried themselves as it were in the shadow, as if they wished to bury themselves in forgetfulness.

"Chevalier," said the duchesse, "you have never given me a single sign of life since our interview at Fontainebleau, and I confess that your presence there on the day of the Franciscan's death, and your initiation in certain secrets, caused me the liveliest astonishment I ever experienced in my whole life."

"I can explain my presence there to you, as well as my initiation," said Aramis.

"But let us, first of all," said the duchesse, "talk a little of ourselves, for our friendship is by no means of recent date."

"Yes, madame: and if Heaven wills it, we shall continue to be friends, I will not say for a long time, but forever."

"That is quite certain, chevalier, and my visit is a proof of it."

"Our interests, duchesse, are no longer the same as they used to be," said Aramis, smiling without apprehension in the growing gloom by which the room was overcast, for it could not reveal that his smile was less agreeable and not so bright as formerly.

"No, chevalier, at the present day we have other in-

terests. Every period of life brings its own; and as we now understand each other in conversing, as perfectly as we formerly did without saying a word, let us talk, if you like."

"I am at your orders, duchesse. Ah! I beg your pardon, how did you obtain my address, and what was your object?"

"You ask me why? I have told you. Curiosity in the first place. I wished to know what you could have to do with the Franciscan, with whom I had certain business transactions, and who died so singularly. You know that on the occasion of our interview at Fontainebleau, in the cemetery, at the foot of the grave so recently closed, we were both so much overcome by our emotions that we omitted to confide to each other what we may have had to say."

"Yes, madame."

"Well, then, I had no sooner left you than I repented, and have ever since been most anxious to ascertain the truth. You know that Madame de Longueville and myself are almost one, I suppose?"

"I was not aware," said Aramis, discreetly.

"I remembered, therefore," continued the duchesse, "that neither of us said anything to the other in the cemetery; that you did not speak of the relationship in which you stood to the Franciscan, whose burial you superintended, and that I did not refer to the position in which I stood to him; all which seemed very unworthy of two such old friends as ourselves, and I have sought an opportunity of an interview with you in order to give you some information that I have recently acquired, and to assure you that Marie Michon, now no more, has left behind her one who has preserved her recollection of events."

Aramis bowed over the duchesse's hand, and pressed

his lips upon it. "You must have had some trouble to find me again," he said.

"Yes," she answered, annoyed to find the subject taking a turn which Aramis wished to give it; "but I knew you were a friend of M. Fouquet's, and so I inquired in that direction."

"A friend! oh!" exclaimed the chevalier, "I can hardly pretend to be *that*. A poor priest who has been favored by a generous protector, and whose heart is full of gratitude and devotion, is all that I pretend to be to M. Fouquet."

"He made you a bishop?"

"Yes, duchesse."

"A very good retiring pension for so handsome a musketeer."

"Yes; in the same way that political intrigue is for yourself," thought Aramis. "And so," he added, "you inquired after me at M. Fouqu t's."

"Easily enough. You had been to Fontainebleau with him, and had undertaken a voyage to your diocese, which is Belle-Isle-en-Mer, I believe."

"No, madame," said Aramis. "My diocese is Vannes."

"I meant that. I only thought that Belle-Isle-en-Mer——"

"Is a property belonging to M. Fouquet, nothing more."

"Ah! I had been told that Belle-Isle was fortified; besides, I know how great the military knowledge is you possess."

"I have forgotten everything of the kind since I entered the Church," said Aramis, annoyed.

"Suffice it to know that I learned you had returned from Vannes, and I sent to one of our friends, M. le Comte de la Fère, who is discretion itself, in order to ascertain it, but he answered that he was not aware of your address."

"So like Athos," thought the bishop; "the really good man never changes."

"Well, then, you know that I cannot venture to show myself here, and that the queen-mother has always some grievance or other against me."

"Yes, indeed, and I am surprised at it."

"Oh! there are various reasons for it. But, to continue, being obliged to conceal myself, I was fortunate enough to meet with M. D'Artagnan, who was formerly one of your old friends, I believe?"

"A friend of mine still, duchesse."

"He gave me certain information, and sent me to M. Baisemeaux, the governor of the Bastile."

Aramis was somewhat agitated at this remark, and a light flashed from his eyes in the darkness of the room, which he could not conceal from his keen-sighted friend. "M. de Baisemeaux!" he said: "why did D'Artagnan send you to M. de Baisemeaux?"

"I cannot tell you."

"What can this possibly mean?" said the bishop, summoning all the resources of his mind to his aid, in order to carry on the combat in a befitting manner.

"M. de Baisemeaux is greatly indebted to you, D'Artagnan told me."

"True, he is so."

"And the address of a creditor is as easily ascertained as that of a debtor."

"Very true; and so Baisemeaux indicated to you——"

"Saint-Mandé, where I forwarded a letter to you."

"Which I have in my hand, and which is most precious to me," said Aramis, "because I am indebted to it for the pleasure of seeing you here." The duchesse, satisfied at having successfully overcome the various difficulties of so delicate an explanation, began to breathe freely again, which Aramis, however, could not succeed in doing.

"We had got as far as your visit to M. Baisemeaux, I believe?"

"Nay," she said, laughing, "farther than that."

"In that case we must have been speaking about the grudge you have against the queen-mother."

"Further still," she returned,—"further still; we were talking of the connection——"

"Which existed between you and the Franciscan," said Aramis, interrupting her eagerly, "well, I am listening to you very attentively."

"It is easily explained," returned the duchesse. "You know that I am living at Brussels with M. de Laicques?"

"I heard so."

"You know that my children have ruined and stripped me of everything."

"How terrible, dear duchesse."

"Terrible indeed; this obliged me to resort to some means of obtaining a livelihood, and particularly, to avoid vegetating for the remainder of my existence. I had old hatreds to turn to account, old friendships to make use of; I no longer had either credit or protectors."

"*You*, who had extended protection towards so many persons," said Aramis, softly.

"It is always the case, chevalier. Well, at the present time I am in the habit of seeing the king of Spain very frequently."

"Ah!"

"Who has just nominated a general of the Jesuits, according to the usual custom."

"Is it usual, indeed?"

"Were you not aware of it?"

"I beg your pardon; I was inattentive."

"You must be aware of that—you who were on such good terms with the Franciscan."

"With the general of the Jesuits, you mean?"

"Exactly. Well, then, I have seen the king of Spain who wished to do me a service, but was unable. He gave me recommendations, however, to Flanders, both for myself and for Laicques too; and conferred a pension on me out of the funds belonging to the order."

"Of Jesuits?"

"Yes. The general—I mean the Franciscan—was sent to me; and, for the purpose of conforming with the requisitions of the statutes of the order, and of entitling me to the pension, I was reputed to be in a position to render certain services. You are aware that that is the rule?"

"No, I did not know it," said Aramis.

Madame de Chevreuse paused to look at Aramis, but it was perfectly dark. "Well, such is the rule, however," she resumed. "I had, therefore, to appear to possess a power of usefulness of some kind or other, and I proposed to travel for the order, and I was placed on the list of affiliated travelers. You understand it was a formality, by means of which I received my pension, which was very convenient for me."

"Good heavens! duchesse, what you tell me is liké a dagger-thrust. *You* obliged to receive a pension from the Jesuits?"

"No, chevalier! from Spain."

"Except for a conscientious scruple, duchesse, you will admit that it is pretty nearly the same thing."

"No, not at all."

"But, surely of your magnificent fortune there must remain——"

"Dampierre is all that remains."

"And that is handsome enough."

"Yes; but Dampierre is burdened, mortgaged, and almost fallen to ruin, like its owner."

"And can the queen-mother know and see all that,

without shedding a tear?" said Aramis, with a penetrating look, which encountered nothing but the darkness.

"Yes. She has forgotten everything."

"You, I believe, attempted to get restored to favor?"

"Yes; but, most singularly, the young king inherits the antipathy his dear father had for me. You will, perhaps, tell me that I am indeed a woman to be hated, and that I am no longer one who can be loved."

"Dear duchesse, pray come quickly to the cause that brought you here; for I think we can be of service to each other."

"Such has been my own thought. I came to Fontainebleau with a double object in view. In the first place, I was summoned there by the Franciscan whom you knew. By the by, how did you know him?—for I have told you my story, and have not yet heard yours."

"I knew him in a very natural way, duchesse. I studied theology with him at Parma. We became fast friends; and it happened, from time to time, that business, or travel, or war, separated us from each other."

"You were, of course, aware that he was the general of the Jesuits?"

"I suspected it."

"But by what extraordinary chance did it happen that you were at the hotel when the affiliated travelers met together?"

"Oh!" said Aramis, in a calm voice, "it was the merest chance in the world. I was going to Fontainebleau to see M. Fouquet, for the purpose of obtaining an audience of the king. I was passing by, unknown; I saw the poor dying monk in the road, and recognized him immediately. You know the rest—he died in my arms."

"Yes; but bequeathing to you so vast a power, that you issue your sovereign orders and directions like a monarch."

"He certainly did leave me a few commissions to settle."

"And what for me?"

"I have told you—a sum of twelve thousand livres was to be paid to you. I thought I had given you the necessary signature to enable you to receive it. Did you not get the money?"

"Oh! yes, yes. You give your orders, I am informed, with so much mystery, and such a majestic presence, that it is generally believed you are the successor of the defunct chief."

Aramis colored impatiently, and the duchesse continued: "I have obtained my information," she said, "from the king of Spain himself; and he cleared up some of my doubts on the point. Every general of the Jesuits is nominated by him, and must be a Spaniard, according to the statutes of the order. You are not a Spaniard, nor have you been nominated by the king of Spain."

Aramis did not reply to this remark, except to say, "You see, duchesse, how greatly you were mistaken, since the king of Spain told you that."

"Yes, my dear Aramis; but there was something else which I have been thinking of."

"What is that?"

"You know, I believe, something about most things, and it occurred to me that you know the Spanish language."

"Every Frenchman who has been actively engaged in the Fronde knows Spanish."

"You have lived in Flanders?"

"Three years."

"And have staid at Madrid?"

"Fifteen months."

"You are in a position, then, to become a naturalized Spaniard, when you like."

"Really?" said Aramis, with a frankness which deceived the duchesse.

"Undoubtedly. Two years' residence and an acquaintance with the language are indispensable. You have upwards of four years—more than double the time necessary."

"What are you driving at, duchesse?"

"At this—I am on good terms with the king of Spain."

"And I am not on bad terms," thought Aramis to himself.

"Shall I ask the king," continued the duchesse, "to confer the succession to the Franciscan's post upon you?"

"Oh, duchesse!"

"You have it already, perhaps?" she said.

"No, upon my honor."

"Very well, then, I can render you that service."

"Why did you not render the same service to M. de Laicques, duchesse? He is a very talented man, and one you love, besides."

"Yes, no doubt; but, at all events, putting Laicques aside, will you have it?"

"No, I thank you, duchesse."

She paused. "He is nominated," she thought; and then resumed aloud, "If you refuse me in this manner, it is not very encouraging for me, supposing I should have something to ask of you."

"Oh! ask, pray ask."

"Ask! I cannot do so, if you have not the power to grant what I want."

"However limited my power and ability, ask all the same."

"I need a sum of money, to restore Dampierre."

"Ah!" replied Aramis, coldly—"money? Well, duchesse, how much would you require?"

"Oh! a tolerably round sum."

"So much the worse—you know I am not rich."

"No, no; but the order is—and if you had been the general——"

"You know I am not the general, I think."

"In that case, you have a friend who must be very wealthy—M. Fouquet."

"M. Fouquet! He is more than half ruined, madame."

"So it is said, but I did not believe it."

"Why, duchesse?"

"Because I have, or rather Laicques has, certain letters in his possession, from Cardinal Mazarin, which establish the existence of very strange accounts.

"What accounts?"

"Relative to various sums of money borrowed and disposed of. I cannot very distinctly remember what they are; but they establish the fact that the superintendent, according to these letters, which are signed by Mazarin, had taken thirteen millions of francs from the coffers of the state. The case is a very serious one."

Aramis clenched his hands in anxiety and apprehension. "Is it possible," he said, "that you have such letters as you speak of, and have not communicated them to M. Fouquet?"

"Ah!" replied the duchesse, "I keep such trifling matters as these in reserve. The day may come when they will be of service; and they can be withdrawn from the safe custody in which they now remain."

"And that day has arrived?" said Aramis.

"Yes."

"And you are going to show those letters to M. Fouquet?"

"I prefer to talk about them with you, instead."

"You must be in sad want of money, my poor friend, to think of such things as these—you, too, who held M. de Mazarin's prose effusions in such indifferent esteem."

"The fact is, I *am* in want of money."

"And then," continued Aramis, in cold accents, "it must have been very distressing to you to be obliged to have recourse to such a means. It is cruel."

"Oh! if I had wished to do harm instead of good," said Madame de Chevreuse, "instead of asking the general of the order, or M. Fouquet, for the five hundred thousand francs I require, I——"

"*Five hundred thousand francs!*"

"Yes; no more. Do you think it much? I require at least as much as that to restore Dampierre."

"Yes, madame."

"I say, therefore, that instead of asking for this amount, I should have gone to see my old friend the queen-mother; the letters from her husband, Signor Mazarini, would have served me as an introduction, and I should have begged this mere trifle of her, saying to her, 'I wish, madame, to have the honor of receiving you at Dampierre. Permit me to put Dampierre in a fit state for that purpose.'"

Aramis did not return a single word. "Well," she said, "what are you thinking about?"

"I am making certain additions," said Aramis.

"And M. Fouquet subtractions. I, on the other hand, am trying my hand at the art of multiplication. What excellent calculators we all three are! How well we might understand one another!"

"Will you allow me to reflect?" said Aramis.

"No, for with such an opening between people like ourselves, 'yes' or 'no' is the only answer, and that an immediate one."

"It is a snare," thought the bishop; "it is impossible

that Anne of Austria would listen to such a woman as this."

"Well!" said the duchesse.

"Well, madame, I should be very much astonished if M. Fouquet had five hundred thousand francs at his disposal at the present moment."

"It is no use speaking of it, then," said the duchesse, "and Dampierre must get restored how best it may."

"Oh! you are not embarrassed to such an extent as that, I suppose."

"No; I am never embarrassed."

"And the queen," continued the bishop, "will certainly do for you what the superintendent is unable to do?"

"Oh! certainly. But tell me, do you not think it would be better that I should speak, myself, to M. Fouquet, about these letters?"

"Nay, duchesse, you will do precisely whatever you please in that respect. M. Fouquet either feels or does not feel himself to be guilty; if he really be so, I know he is proud enough not to confess it; if he be not so, he will be exceedingly offended at your menace."

"As usual, you reason like an angel," said the duchesse, as she rose from her seat.

"And so, you are now going to denounce M. Fouquet to the queen," said Aramis.

"'Denounce!' Oh! what a disagreeable word. I shall not 'denounce' my dear friend; you now know matters of policy too well to be ignorant how easily these affairs are arranged. I shall merely side against M. Fouquet, and, nothing more; and, in a war of party against party, a weapon is always a weapon."

"No doubt."

"And once on friendly terms again with the queen-mother, I may be dangerous towards some persons."

"You are at perfect liberty to prove so, duchesse."

"A liberty of which I shall avail myself."

"You are not ignorant, I suppose, duchesse, that M. Fouquet is on the best terms with the king of Spain."

"I suppose so."

"If, therefore, you begin a party warfare against M. Fouquet, he will reply in the same way; for he, too, is at perfect liberty to do so, is he not?"

"Oh! certainly."

"And as he is on good terms with Spain, he will make use of that friendship as a weapon of attack."

"You mean, that he is, naturally, on good terms with the general of the order of the Jesuits, my dear Aramis."

"That may be the case, duchesse."

"And that, consequently, the pension I have been receiving from the order will be stopped."

"I am greatly afraid it might be."

"Well; I must contrive to console myself in the best way I can; for after Richelieu, after the Fronde, after exile, what is there left for Madame de Chevreuse to be afraid of?"

"The pension, you are aware, is forty-eight thousand francs."

"Alas! I am quite aware of it."

"Moreover, in party contests, you know, the friends of one's enemy do not escape."

"Ah! you mean that poor Laicques will have to suffer."

"I am afraid it is almost inevitable, duchesse."

"Oh! he only receives twelve thousand francs pension."

"Yes, but the king of Spain has some influence left; advised by M. Fouquet, he might get M. Laicques shut up in prison for a little while."

"I am not very nervous on that point, my dear friend; because, once reconciled with Anne of Austria, I will

undertake that France would insist upon M. Laicques's liberation."

"True. In that case, you will have something else to apprehend."

"What can that be?" said the duchesse, pretending to be surprised and terrified.

"You will learn; indeed, you must know it already, that having once been an affiliated member of the order, it is not easy to leave it; for the secrets that any particular member may have acquired are unwholesome, and carry with them the germs of misfortune for whosoever may reveal them."

The duchesse paused and reflected for a moment, and then said. "That is more serious: I will think over it."

And notwithstanding the profound obscurity, Aramis seemed to feel a basilisk glance, like white-hot iron, escape from his friend's eyes, and plunge into his heart.

"Let us recapitulate," said Aramis, determined to keep himself on his guard, and gliding his hand into his breast, where he had a dagger concealed.

"Exactly, let us recapitulate; short accounts make long friends."

"The suppression of your pension——"

"Forty-eight thousand francs, and that of Laicques' twelve, make together, sixty thousand francs; that is what you mean, I suppose?"

"Precisely; and I was trying to find out what would be your equivalent for that."

"Five hundred thousand francs, which I shall get from the queen."

"Or, which you will *not* get."

"I know a means of procuring them," said the duchesse, thoughtlessly.

This remark made the chevalier prick up his ears; and from the moment his adversary had committed this error,

his mind was so thoroughly on its guard, that he seemed every moment to gain the advantage more and more; and she, consequently, to lose it. "I will admit, for argument's sake, that you obtain the money," he resumed, "you will lose twice as much, having a hundred thousand francs' pension to receive instead of sixty thousand, and that for a period of ten years."

"Not so, for I shall only be subjected to this reduction of my income during the period of M. Fouquet's remaining in power, a period which I estimate at two months."

"Ah!" said Aramis.

"I am frank, you see."

"I thank you for it, duchesse; but you would be wrong to suppose, that after M. Fouquet's disgrace the order would resume the payment of your pension."

"I know a means of making the order pay, as I know a means of forcing the queen-mother to concede what I require."

"In that case, duchesse, we are all obliged to strike our flags to you. The victory is yours, and the triumph also. Be clement, I entreat you."

"But is it possible," resumed the duchesse, without taking notice of the irony, "that you really draw back from a miserable sum of five hundred thousand francs, when it is a question of sparing you—I mean your friend—I beg your pardon, I ought rather to say your protector—the disagreeable consequences which a party contest produces?"

"Duchesse, I will tell you why; supposing the five hundred thousand francs were to be given you, M. Laicques will require his share, which will be another five hundred thousand francs, I presume? and then, after M. de Laicques' and your own portions have been arranged, the portions which your children, your poor pensioners, and various other persons will require, will start up as fresh claims,

and these letters, however compromising they may be in their nature are not worth from three to four millions. Can you have forgotten the queen of France's diamonds?—they were surely worth more than these bits of waste paper signed by Mazarin, and yet their recovery did not cost a fourth part of what you ask for yourself."

"Yes, that is true; but the merchant values his goods at his own price, and it is for the purchaser to buy or refuse."

"Stay a moment, duchesse; would you like me to tell you why I will not buy your letters?"

"Pray tell me."

"Because the letters you claim to be Mazarin's are false."

"What an absurdity."

"I have no doubt of it, for it would, to say the least, be very singular, that after you had quarreled with the queen through M. Mazarin's means, you should have kept up any intimate acquaintance with the latter; it would look as if you had been acting as a spy; and upon my word, I do not like to make use of the word."

"Oh! pray do."

"Your great complacence would seem suspicious, at all events."

"That is quite true; but the contents of the letters are even more so."

"I pledge you my word, duchesse, that you will not be able to make use of it with the queen."

"Oh! yes, indeed; I can make use of everything with the queen."

"Very good," thought Aramis. "Croak on, old owl—hiss, beldame-viper."

But the duchesse had said enough, and advanced a few steps towards the door. Aramis, however, had reserved one exposure which she did *not* expect.

He rang the bell, candles immediately appeared in the adjoining room, and the bishop found himself completely encircled by lights, which shone upon the worn, haggard face of the duchesse, revealing every feature but too clearly. Aramis fixed a long ironical look upon her pale, thin, withered cheeks—her dim, dull eyes—and upon her lips which she kept carefully closed over her discolored scanty teeth. He, however, had thrown himself into a graceful attitude, with his haughty and intelligent head thrown back; he smiled so as to reveal teeth still brilliant and dazzling. The antiquated coquette understood the trick that had been played her. She was standing immediately before a large mirror, in which her decrepitude so carefully concealed, was only made more manifest. And, thereupon, without even saluting Aramis, who bowed with the ease and grace of the musketeer of early days, she hurried away with trembling steps, which her very precipitation only the more impeded. Aramis sprang across the room, like a zephyr, to lead her to the door. Madame de Chevreuse made a sign to her servant, who resumed his musket and she left the house where such tender friends had not been able to understand each other only because they had understood each other too well.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEREIN MAY BE SEEN THAT A BARGAIN WHICH CANNOT BE MADE WITH ONE PERSON, CAN BE CARRIED OUT WITH ANOTHER.

Aramis had been perfectly correct in his supposition; for hardly had she left the house in the Place Baudoyer, than Madame de Chevreuse proceeded homeward. She was doubtless afraid of being followed, and by this means

thought she might succeed in throwing those who might be following her off their guard; but scarcely had she arrived within the door of the hotel, and hardly had assured herself that no one who could cause her any uneasiness was on her track, when she opened the door of the garden, leading into another street, and hurried towards the Rue Croix des Petits Champs, where M. Colbert resided.

We have already said that evening, or rather night, had closed in; it was a dark, thick night, besides; Paris had once more sunk into its calm, quiescent state, enshrouding alike within its indulgent mantle the high-born duchesse carrying out her political intrigue, and the simple citizen's wife, who, having been detained late by a supper in the city, was making her way slowly homewards, hanging on the arm of a lover, by the shortest possible route. Madame de Chevreuse had been too well accustomed to nocturnal political intrigues to be ignorant that a minister never denies himself, even at his own private residence, to any young and beautiful woman who may chance to object to the dust and confusion of a public office, or to old women, as full of experience as of years, who dislike the indiscreet echo of official residences. A valet received the duchesse under the peristyle, and received her, it must be admitted, with some indifference of manner; he intimated, after having looked at her face, that it was hardly at such an hour that one so advanced in years as herself, could be permitted to disturb Monsieur Colbert's important occupations. But Madame de Chevreuse, without looking or appearing to be annoyed, wrote her name upon a leaf of her tablets,—a name which had but too frequently sounded so disagreeably in the ears of Louis XIII. and of the great cardinal. She wrote her name in the large, ill-formed characters of the higher classes of that period, folded the paper in a manner peculiarly her own, handed it to the valet, without uttering a word, but with so

haughty and imperious a gesture, that the fellow, well accustomed to judge of people from their manners and appearance, perceived at once the quality of the person before him, bowed his head, and ran to M. Colbert's room. The minister could not control a sudden exclamation as he opened the paper; and the valet, gathering from it the interest with which his master regarded the mysterious visitor, returned as fast as he could to beg the duchesse to follow him. She ascended to the first floor of the beautiful new house very slowly, rested herself on the landing-place, in order not to enter the apartment out of breath and appeared before M. Colbert, who, with his own hands, held both the folding doors open. The duchesse paused at the threshold, for the purpose of well-studying the character of the man with whom she was about to converse. At the first glance, the round, large, heavy head, thick brows, and ill-favored features of Colbert, who wore, thrust low down on his head, a cap like a priest's *calotte*, seemed to indicate that but little difficulty was likely to be met with in her negotiations with him, but also that she was to expect as little interest in the discussion of particulars; for there was scarcely any indication that the rough and uncouth nature of the man was susceptible to the impulses of a refined revenge, or of an exalted ambition. But when, on closer inspection, the duchesse perceived the small piercingly black eyes, the longitudinal wrinkles of his high and massive forehead, the imperceptible twitching of the lips, on which were apparent traces of rough good-humor, Madame de Chevreuse altered her opinion of him, and felt she could say to herself: "I have found the man I want."

"What is the subject, madame, which procures me the honor of a visit from you?" he inquired.

"The need I have of you, monsieur," returned the duchesse, "as well as that which you have of me."

"I am delighted, madame, with the first portion of your sentence; but, as far as the second portion is concerned——"

Madame de Chevreuse sat down in the arm-chair which M. Colbert advanced towards her. "Monsieur Colbert, you are the intendant of finances, and are ambitious of becoming the superintendent?"

"Madame!"

"Nay, do not deny it; that would only unnecessarily prolong our conversation, and that is useless."

"And yet, madame, however well-disposed and inclined to show politeness I may be towards a lady of your position and merit, nothing will make me confess that I have ever entertained the idea of supplanting my superior."

"I said nothing about supplanting, Monsieur Colbert. Could I accidentally have made use of that word? I hardly think that likely. The word 'replace' is less aggressive in its signification, and more grammatically suitable, as M. de Voiture would say. I presume, therefore, that you are ambitious of replacing M. Fouquet."

"M. Fouquet's fortune, madame, enables him to withstand all attempts. The superintendent in this age plays the part of the Colossus of Rhodes; the vessels pass beneath him and do not overthrow him."

"I ought to have availed myself precisely of that very comparison. It is true, M. Fouquet plays the part of the Colossus of Rhodes; but I remember to have heard it said by M. Conrart, a member of the academy, I believe, that when the Colossus of Rhodes fell from its lofty position, the merchant who had cast it down—a merchant, nothing more, M. Colbert—loaded four hundred camels with the ruins. A merchant! and that is considerably less than an intendant of finances."

"Madame, I can assure you that I shall never overthrow Monsieur Fouquet."

"Very good, Monsieur Colbert, since you persist in showing so much sensitiveness with me, as if you were ignorant that I am Madame de Chevreuse, and also that I am somewhat advanced in years; in other words, that you have to do with a woman who has had political dealings with the Cardinal de Richelieu, and who has no time to lose; as, I repeat, you do not hesitate to commit such an imprudence, I shall go and find others who are more intelligent and more desirous of making their fortunes."

"How, madame, how?"

"You give me a very poor idea of negotiators of the present day. I assure you that if, in my earlier days, a woman had gone to M. de Cinq-Mars, who was not, moreover, a man of a very high order of intellect, and had said to him about the cardinal what I have just said to you of M. Fouquet, M. de Cinq-Mars would by this time have already set actively to work."

"Nay, madame, show a little indulgence, I entreat you."

"Well, then, do you really consent to replace M. Fouquet."

"Certainly, I do, if the king dismisses M. Fouquet."

"Again, a word too much; it is quite evident that if you have not yet succeeded in driving M. Fouquet from his post, it is because you have not been able to do so. Therefore, I should be the greatest simpleton possible if, in coming to you, I did not bring the very thing you require."

"I am distressed to be obliged to persist, madame," said Colbert, after a silence which enabled the duchesse to sound the depth of his dissimulation, "but I must warn you that, for the last six years, denunciation after denunciation has been made against M. Fouquet, and he has remained unshaken and unaffected by them."

"There is a time for everything, Monsieur Colbert; those who were the authors of those denunciations were not called Madame de Chevreuse, and they had no proofs equal to the six letters from M. de Mazarin which establish the offense in question."

"The offense!"

"The crime, if you like it better."

"The crime! committed by M. Fouquet!"

"Nothing less. It is rather strange, M. Colbert, but your face, which just now was cold and indifferent, is now positively the very reverse."

"A crime!"

"I am delighted to see it makes an impression upon you."

"It is because that word, madame, embraces so many things."

"It embraces the post of superintendent of finance for yourself, and a letter of exile, or the Bastile, for M. Fouquet."

"Forgive me, madame la duchesse, but it is almost impossible that M. Fouquet can be exiled; to be imprisoned or disgraced, that is already a great deal."

"Oh, I am perfectly aware of what I am saying," returned Madame de Chevreuse, coldly. "I do not live at such a distance from Paris as not to know what takes place there. The king does not like M. Fouquet, and he would willingly sacrifice M. Fouquet if an opportunity were only given him."

"It must be a good one, though."

"Good enough, and one I estimate to be worth five hundred thousand francs."

"In what way?" said Colbert.

"I mean, monsieur, that holding this opportunity in my own hands, I will not allow it to be transferred to yours except for a sum of five hundred thousand francs."

"I understand you perfectly, madame. But since you have fixed a price for the sale, let me now see the value of the articles to be sold."

"Oh, a mere trifle; six letters, as I have already told you, from M. de Mazarin; and the autographs will most assuredly not be regarded as too highly priced, if they establish, in an irrefutable manner, that M. Fouquet has embezzled large sums of money from the treasury and appropriated them to his own purposes."

"In an irrefutable manner, do you say?" observed Colbert, whose eyes sparkled with delight.

"Perfectly so; would you like to read the letters?"

"With all my heart! Copies, of course?"

"Of course, the copies," said the duchesse, as she drew from her bosom a small packet of papers flattened by her velvet bodice. "Read," she said.

Colbert eagerly snatched the papers and devoured them. "Excellent!" he said.

"It is clear enough, is it not?"

"Yes, madame, yes; M. Mazarin must have handed the money to M. Fouquet, who must have kept it for his own purposes; but the question is, what money?"

"Exactly,—what money; if we come to terms I will join to these six letters a seventh, which will supply you with the fullest particulars."

Colbert reflected. "And the originals of those letters?"

"A useless question to ask; exactly as if I were to ask you, Monsieur Colbert, whether the money-bags you will give me will be full or empty."

"Very good, madame."

"Is it concluded?"

"No; for there is one circumstance to which neither of us has given any attention."

"Name it!"

"M. Fouquet can be utterly ruined, under the circum-

stances you have detailed, only by means of legal proceedings."

"Well?"

"A public scandal, for instance; and yet neither the legal proceedings nor the scandal can be commenced against him."

"Why not?"

"Because he is procureur-général of the parliament; because, too, in France, all public administrations, the army, justice itself, and commerce, are intimately connected by ties of good-fellowship, which people call *esprit de corps*. In such a case, madame, the parliament will never permit its chief to be dragged before a public tribunal; and never, even if he be dragged there by royal authority, never, I say, will he be condemned."

"Well, Monsieur Colbert, I do not see what I have to do with that."

"I am aware of that, madame; but I have to do with it, and it consequently diminishes the value of what you have brought to show me. What good can a proof of crime be to me, without the possibility of obtaining a condemnation?"

"Even if he be only suspected, M. Fouquet will lose his post of superintendent."

"Is that all?" exclaimed Colbert, whose dark, gloomy features were momentarily lighted up by an expression of hate and vengeance.

"Ah! ah! Monsieur Colbert," said the duchesse, "forgive me, but I did not think you were so impressionable. Very good; in that case, since you need more than I have to give you, there is no occasion to speak of the matter at all."

"Yes, madame, we will go on talking of it; only, as the value of your commodities has decreased, you must lower your pretensions."

"You are bargaining, then?"

"Every man who wishes to deal loyally is obliged to do so."

"How much will you offer me?"

"Two hundred thousand francs," said Colbert.

The duchesse laughed in his face, and then said suddenly, "wait a moment, I have another arrangement to propose: will you give me three hundred thousand francs?"

"No, no."

"Oh, you can either accept or refuse my terms; besides, that is not all."

"More still! you are becoming too impracticable to deal with, madame."

"Less so than you think, perhaps, for it is not money I am going to ask you for."

"What is it, then?"

"A service; you know that I have always been most affectionately attached to the queen, and I am desirous of having an interview with her majesty."

"With the queen?"

"Yes, Monsieur Colbert, with the queen, who is, I admit, no longer my friend, and who has ceased to be so for a long time past, but who may again become so if the opportunity be only given her."

"Her majesty has ceased to receive any one, madame. She is a great sufferer, and you may be aware that the paroxysms of her disease occur with greater frequency than ever."

"That is the very reason why I wish to have an interview with her majesty; for in Flanders there is a great variety of these kinds of complaints."

"What, cancers—a fearful, incurable disorder?"

"Do not believe that, Monsieur Colbert. The Flemish peasant is somewhat a man of nature, and his companion

for life is not alone a wife, but a female laborer also; for while he is smoking his pipe, the woman works: it is she who draws the water from the well; she who loads the mule or the ass, and even bears herself a portion of the burden. Taking but little care of herself, she gets knocked about first in one direction, and then in another, and very often is beaten by her husband, and cancers frequently rise from contusions."

"True, true," said Colbert.

"The Flemish women do not die the sooner on that account. When they are great sufferers from this disease they go in search of remedies, and the Béguines of Bruges are excellent doctors for every kind of disease. They have precious waters of one sort or another; specifics of various kinds; and they give a bottle of it and a wax candle to the sufferer, whereby the priests are gainers, and Heaven is served by the disposal of both their wares. I will take the queen some of this holy water, which I will procure from the Béguines of Bruges; her majesty will recover, and will burn as many wax candles as she may see fit. You see, Monsieur Colbert, to prevent my seeing the queen is almost as bad as committing the crime of regicide."

"You are undoubtedly, Madame la duchesse, a woman of exceedingly great abilities, and I am more than astounded at their display; still I cannot but suppose that this charitable consideration towards the queen in some measure covers a slight personal interest for yourself."

"I have not given myself the trouble to conceal it, that I am aware of, Monsieur Colbert. You said, I believe, that I had a slight personal interest? On the contrary, it is a very great interest, and I will prove it to you, by resuming what I was saying. If you procure me a personal interview with her majesty, I will be satisfied with the three hundred thousand francs I have claimed; if not, I

shall keep my letters, unless, indeed, you give me, on the spot, five hundred thousand francs for them."

And rising from her seat with this decisive remark, the old duchesse plunged M. Colbert into a disagreeable perplexity. To bargain any further was out of the question; and not to bargain was to pay a great deal too dearly for them. "Madame," he said, "I shall have the pleasure of handing you over a hundred thousand crowns; but how shall I get the actual letters themselves?"

"In the simplest manner in the world, my dear Monsieur Colbert—whom will you trust?"

The financier began to laugh silently, so that his large eyebrows went up and down like the wings of a bat, upon the deep lines of his yellow forehead. "No one," he said.

"You surely will make an exception in your own favor, Monsieur Colbert?"

"In what way, madame?"

"I mean, that if you would take the trouble to accompany me to the place where the letters are, they would be delivered into your own hands, and you would be able to verify and check them."

"Quite true."

"You would bring the hundred thousand crowns with you at the same time, for I, too, do not trust any one?"

Colbert colored to the tips of his ears. Like all eminent men in the art of figures, he was of an insolent and mathematical probity. "I will take with me, madame," he said, "two orders for the amount agreed upon, payable at my treasury. Will that satisfy you?"

"Would that the orders on your treasury were for two millions, monsieur l'intendant! I shall have the pleasure of showing you the way, then?"

"Allow me to order my carriage?"

"I have a carriage below, monsieur."

Colbert coughed like an irresolute man. He imagined,

for a moment, that the proposition of the duchesse was a snare; that perhaps some one was waiting at the door; and that she whose secret had just been sold to Colbert for a hundred thousand crowns, had already offered it to Fouquet for the same sum. As he still hesitated, the duchesse looked at him full in the face.

"You prefer your own carriage?" she said.

"I admit I *do*."

"You suppose I am going to lead you into a snare or trap of some sort or other?"

"Madame la duchesse, you have the character of being somewhat inconsiderate at times, and, as I am reputed a sober, solemn character, a jest or practical joke might compromise me."

"Yes; the fact is, you are afraid. Well, then, take your own carriage, as many servants as you like, only think well of what I am going to say. What we two may arrange between ourselves, we are the only persons who will know—if a third person is present we might as well tell the whole world about it. After all, I do not make a point of it, my carriage shall follow yours, and I shall be satisfied to accompany you in your own carriage to the queen."

"To the queen?"

"Have you forgotten that already? Is it possible that one of the clauses of the agreement of so much importance to me, can have escaped you so soon? How trifling it seems to you, indeed; if I had known it I should have asked double what I have done."

"I have reflected, madame, and I shall not accompany you."

"Really—and why not?"

"Because I have the most perfect confidence in you."

"You overpower me. But—provided I receive the hundred thousand crowns?"

"Here they are, madame," said Colbert, scribbling a few lines on a piece of paper, which he handed to the duchesse, adding, "You are paid."

"The trait is a fine one, Monsieur Colbert, and I will reward you for it," she said, beginning to laugh.

Madame de Chevreuse's laugh was a very sinister sound; a man with youth, faith, love, life itself, throbbing in his heart, would prefer a sob to such a lamentable laugh. The duchesse opened the front of her dress and drew forth from her bosom, somewhat less white than it once had been, a small packet of papers, tied with a flame-colored ribbon, and, still laughing, she said, "There, Monsieur Colbert, are the originals of Cardinal Mazarin's letters; they are now your own property," she added, refastening the body of her dress; "your fortune is secured. And now accompany me to the queen."

"No, madame; if you are again about to run the chance of her majesty's displeasure, and it were known at the Palais-Royal that I had been the means of introducing you there, the queen would never forgive me while she lived. No; there are certain persons at the palace who are devoted to me, who will procure you an admission without my being compromised."

"Just as you please, provided I enter."

"What do you term those religious women at Bruges who cure disorders?"

"Béguines."

"Good; are you one?"

"As you please,—but I must soon cease to be one."

"That is your affair."

"Excuse me, but I do not wish to be exposed to a refusal."

"That is again your own affair, madame. I am going to give directions to the head valet of the gentleman in waiting on the queen to allow admission to a Béguine,

who brings an effectual remedy for her majesty's sufferings. You are the bearer of my letter, you will undertake to be provided with the remedy, and will give every explanation on the subject. I admit a knowledge of a Béguine, but I deny all knowledge of Madame de Chevreuse. Here, madame, then, is your letter of introduction."

CHAPTER XX.

THE SKIN OF THE BEAR.

Colbert handed the duchesse the letter, and gently drew aside the chair behind which she was standing; Madame de Chevreuse, with a very slight bow, immediately left the room. Colbert, who had recognized Mazarin's handwriting, and had counted the letters, rang to summon his secretary, whom he enjoined to go in immediate search of M. Vanel, a counselor of the parliament. The secretary replied that, according to his usual practice, M. Vanel had just that moment entered the house, in order to give the intendant an account of the principal details of the business which had been transacted during the day in parliament. Colbert approached one of the lamps, read the letters of the deceased cardinal over again, smiled repeatedly as he recognized the great value of the papers Madame de Chevreuse had just delivered—and burying his head in his hands for a few minutes, reflected profoundly. In the meantime, a tall, loosely-made man entered the room; his spare, thin face, steady look, and hooked nose, as he entered Colbert's cabinet, with a modest assurance of manner, revealed a character at once supple and decided,—supple towards the

master who could throw him the prey, firm towards the dogs who might possibly be disposed to dispute its possession. M. Vanel carried a voluminous bundle of papers under his arm, and placed it on the desk on which Colbert was leaning both his elbows, as he supported his head.

"Good-day, M. Vanel," said the latter, rousing himself from his meditation.

"Good-day, monseigneur," said Vanel, naturally.

"You should say monsieur, and not monseigneur," replied Colbert, gently.

"We give the title of monseigneur to ministers," returned Vanel, with extreme self-possession, "and you are a minister."

"Not yet."

"You are so in point of fact, and I call you monseigneur accordingly; besides you are seigneur for *me* and that is sufficient; if you dislike my calling you monseigneur before others, allow me, at least, to call you so in private."

Colbert raised his head as if to read, or try to read, upon Vanel's face how much or how little sincerity entered into this protestation of devotion. But the counselor knew perfectly well how to sustain the weight of such a look, even backed with the full authority of the title he had conferred. Colbert sighed; he could not read anything in Vanel's face, and Vanel might possibly be honest in his professions, but Colbert recollected that this man, inferior to himself in every other respect, was actually his master in virtue of the fact of his having a wife. As he was pitying this man's lot, Vanel coldly drew from his pocket a perfumed letter, sealed with Spanish wax, and held it toward Colbert, saying. "A letter from my wife, monseigneur."

Colbert coughed, took, opened, and read the letter, and then put it carefully away in his pocket, while Vanel

turned over the leaves of the papers he had brought with him with an unmoved and unconcerned air. "Vanel," he said suddenly to his *protégé*, "you are a hard-working man, I know; would twelve hours' daily labor frighten you?"

"I work fifteen hours every day."

"Impossible. A counselor need not work more than three hours a day in parliament."

"Oh! I am working up some returns for a friend of mine in the department of accounts, and, as I still have spare time on my hands, I am studying Hebrew."

"Your reputation stands high in the parliament, Vanel."

"I believe so, monseigneur."

"You must not grow rusty in your post of counselor."

"What must I do to avoid it?"

"Purchase a high place. Mean and low ambitions are very difficult to satisfy."

"Small purses are the most difficult ones to fill, monseigneur."

"What post have you in view?" said Colbert.

"I see none—not one."

"There is one, certainly, but one need be almost the king himself to be able to buy it without inconvenience; and the king will not be inclined, I suppose, to purchase the post of procureur-général."

At these words, Vanel fixed his peculiar, humble, dull look upon Colbert, who could hardly tell whether Vanel comprehended him or not. "Why do you speak to me, monseigneur," said Vanel, "of the post of procureur-général to the parliament; I know no other post than the one M. Fouquet fills."

"Exactly so, my dear counselor."

"You are not over fastidious, monseigneur; but before the post can be bought, it must be offered for sale."

"I believe, Monsieur Vanel, that it will be for sale before long."

"For sale! What! M. Fouquet's post of procureur général?"

"So it is *said*."

"The post which renders him so perfectly invincible for sale! Ha, ha!" said Vanel, beginning to laugh.

"Would you be afraid, then, of the post?" said Colbert gravely.

"Afraid! no; but——"

"Are you desirous of obtaining it?"

"You are laughing at me, monseigneur," replied Vanel "Is it likely that a counselor of the parliament would not be desirous of becoming procureur-général?"

"Well, Monsieur Vanel, since I tell you that the post, as report goes, will be shortly for sale——"

"I cannot help repeating, monseigneur, that it is impossible; a man never throws away the buckler, behind which he maintains his honor, his fortune, his very life."

"There are certain men mad enough, Vanel, to fancy themselves out of the reach of all mischances."

"Yes, monseigneur; but such men never commit their mad acts for the advantage of the poor Vanels of the world."

"Why not?"

"For the very reason that those Vanels are poor."

"It is true that M. Fouquet's post might cost a good round sum. What would you bid for it, Monsieur Vanel?"

"Everything I am worth."

"Which means?"

"Three or four hundred thousand francs."

"And the post is worth——"

"A million and a half, at the very lowest. I know persons who have offered one million seven hundred thousand

francs, without being able to persuade M. Fouquet to sell. Besides, supposing it were to happen that M. Fouquet wished to sell, which I do not believe, in spite of what I have been told——"

"Ah! you have heard something about it, then; who told you?

"M. de Gourville, M. Pélisson, and others."

"Very good; if, therefore, M. Fouquet did wish to sell——"

"I could not buy it just yet since the superintendent will only sell for ready money, and no one has a million and a half to put down at once."

Colbert suddenly interrupted the counselor by an imperious gesture; he had begun to meditate. Observing his superior's serious attitude, and his perseverance in continuing the conversation on this subject, Vanel awaited the solution without venturing to precipitate it.

"Explain to me the privileges which this post confers."

"The right of impeaching every French subject who is not a prince of the blood; the right of quashing all proceedings taken against any Frenchman, who is neither king nor prince. The procureur-général is the king's right hand to punish the guilty; the office is the means whereby also he can evade the administration of justice. M. Fouquet, therefore, would be able, by stirring up parliament, to maintain himself even against the king; and the king could as easily, by humoring M. Fouquet, get his edicts registered in spite of every opposition and objection. The procureur-généralship can be made a very useful or a very dangerous instrument."

"Vanel, would you like to be procureur-général?" said Colbert, suddenly, softening both his look and his voice.

"I!" exclaimed the latter; "I have already had the honor to represent to you that I want about eleven hundred thousand francs to make up the amount."

"Borrow that sum from your friends."

"I have no friends richer than myself."

"You are an honest and honorable man, Vanel."

"Ah! monseigneur, if the world would only think as you do!"

"I think so, and that is quite enough; and if it should be needed, I will be your security."

"Do not forget the proverb, monseigneur."

"What is it?"

"That he who becomes responsible for another has to pay for his fancy."

"Let that make no difference."

Vanel rose, bewildered by this offer which had been so suddenly and unexpectedly made to him. "You are not trifling with me, monseigneur?" he said.

"Stay; you say that M. Gourville has spoken to you about M. Fouquet's post."

"Yes; and M. Pélisson also."

"Officially so, or only through their own suggestion?"

"These were their very words: 'These parliament members are as proud as they are wealthy; they ought to club together two or three millions among themselves, to present to their protector and leader, M. Fouquet.'"

"And what did you reply?"

"I said that, for my own part, I would give ten thousand francs if necessary."

"Ah! you like M. Fouquet, then!" exclaimed Colbert, with a look of hatred.

"No; but M. Fouquet is our chief. He is in debt—is on the high road to ruin; and we ought to save the honor of the body of which we are members."

"Exactly; and that explains why M. Fouquet will be always safe and sound, so long as he occupies his present post," replied Colbert.

"Thereupon," said Vanel, "M. Gourville added, 'If

we were to do anything out of charity to M. Fouquet, it could not be otherwise than most humiliating to him; and he would be sure to refuse it. Let the parliament subscribe among themselves to purchase, in a proper manner, the post of procureur-général; in that case, all would go well; the honor of our body would be saved, and M. Fouquet's pride spared."

"That is an opening."

"I considered it so, monseigneur."

"Well, Monsieur Vanel, you will go at once, and find out either M. Gourville or M. Pélisson. Do you know any other friend of M. Fouquet?"

"I know M. de la Fontaine very well."

"La Fontaine, the rhymester?"

"Yes; he used to write verses to my wife, when M. Fouquet was one of our friends."

"Go to him, then, and try and procure an interview with the superintendent."

"Willingly—but the sum itself?"

"On the day and hour you arrange to settle the matter, Monsieur Vanel, you shall be supplied with the money; so, do not make yourself uneasy on *that* account."

"Monseigneur, such munificence! You eclipse kings even—you surpass M. Fouquet himself."

"Stay a moment—do not let us mistake each other, I do not make you a present of fourteen hundred thousand francs, Monsieur Vanel; for I have children to provide for—but I will *lend* you that sum."

"Ask whatever interest, whatever security you please, monseigneur; I am quite ready. And when all your requisitions are satisfied, I will still repeat, that you surpass kings and M. Fouquet in munificence. What conditions do you impose?"

"The repayment in eight years, and a mortgage upon the appointment itself."

"Certainly. Is that all?"

"Wait a moment. I reserve to myself the right of purchasing the post from you at one hundred and fifty thousand francs profit for yourself, if, in your mode of filling the office, you do not follow out a line of conduct in conformity with the interests of the king and with my projects."

"Ah—h!"—said Vanel in an altered tone.

"Is there anything in that which can possibly be objectionable to you, Monsieur Vanel?" said Colbert, coldly.

"Oh! no, no," replied Vanel, nervously.

"Very good. We will sign an agreement to that effect, whenever you like. And now, go as quickly as you can to M. Fouquet's friends, obtain an interview with the superintendent; do not be too difficult in making whatever concessions may be required of you; and when once the arrangements are all made——"

"I will press him to sign."

"Be most careful to do nothing of the kind; do not speak of signatures with M. Fouquet, nor of deeds, nor even ask him to pass his word. Understand this: otherwise you will lose everything. All you have to do is to get M. Fouquet to give you his hand on the matter. Go, go."

CHAPTER XXI.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE QUEEN-MOTHER.

The queen-mother was in the bedroom at the Palais-Royal, with Madame de Motteville and Señora Molina. King Louis, who had been impatiently expected the whole day, had not made his appearance; and the queen, who was

growing impatient, had often sent to inquire about him. The moral atmosphere of the court seemed to indicate an approaching storm; the courtiers and the ladies of the court avoided meeting in the antechambers and the corridors, in order not to converse on compromising subjects. Monsieur had joined the king early in the morning for a hunting-party; Madame remained in her own apartment, cool and distant to every one; and the queen-mother, after she had said her prayers in Latin, talked of domestic matters with her two friends in pure Castilian. Madame de Motteville, who understood the language perfectly, answered her in French. When the three ladies had exhausted every form of dissimulation and of politeness, as a circuitous mode of expressing that the king's conduct was making the queen and the queen-mother pine away through sheer grief and vexation, and when, in the most guarded and polished phrases, they had fulminated every variety of imprecation against Mademoiselle de la Vallière, the queen-mother terminated her attack by an exclamation indicative of her own reflections and character. "*Estos hijos!*" said she to Molina—whi h means, "These children!" words full of meaning on a mother's lips—words full of terrible significance in the mouth of a queen who, like Anne of Austria, hid many curious secrets in her soul.

"Yes," said Molina, "children, children! for whom every mother becomes a sacrifice."

"Yes," replied th queen; "a mother sacrifices everything, certainly." She did not finish her phrase; for she fancied, when she raised her eyes towards the full-length portrait of the pale Louis XIII., that light once more flashed from her husband's dull eyes, and his nostrils grew livid with wrath. The portrait seemed animated by a living expression—speak it did not, but it seemed to threaten. A profound silence succeeded the queen's last

remark. La Molina began to turn over ribbons and laces on a large work-table. Madame de Motteville, surprised at the look of mutual intelligence which had been exchanged between the confidant and her mistress, cast down her eyes like a discreet woman, and pretending to be observant of nothing that was passing, listened with the utmost attention, to every word. She heard nothing, however, but a very insignificant "hum" on the part of the Spanish duenna, who was the incarnation of caution —and a profound sigh on that of the queen. She looked up immediately.

"You are suffering?" she said.

"No, Motteville, no; why do you say that?"

"Your majesty almost groaned just now."

"You are right; I did sigh, in truth."

"Monsieur Vallot is not far off; I believe he is in Madame's apartment."

"Why is he with Madame?"

"Madame is troubled with nervous attacks."

"A very fine disorder, indeed! There is little good in M. Vallot being there, when a very different physician would quickly cure Madame."

Madame de Motteville looked up with an air of great surprise, as she replied, "Another doctor instead of M. Vallot?—whom do you mean?"

"Occupation, Motteville, occupation. If any one is really ill, it is my poor daughter."

"And your majesty, too."

"Less so this evening, though."

"Do not believe that too confidently, Madame," said De Motteville. And, as if to justify her caution, a sharp, acute pain seized the queen, who turned deadly pale, and threw herself back in the chair, with every symptom of a sudden fainting fit. Molina ran to a richly-gilded tortoise-shell cabinet, from which she took a large rock-

crystal bottle of scented salts, and held it to the queen's nostrils, who inhaled it wildly for a few minutes, and murmured:

"It is hastening my death—but Heaven's will be done!"

"Your majesty's death is not so near at hand," added Molina, replacing the smelling-bottle in the cabinet.

"Does your majesty feel better now?" inquired Madame de Motteville.

"Much better," returned the queen, placing her finger on her lips, to impose silence on her favorite.

"It is very strange," remarked Madame de Motteville, after a pause.

"What is strange?" said the queen.

"Does your majesty remember the day when this pain attacked you for the first time?"

"I remember only that it was a grievously sad day for me, Motteville."

"But your majesty did not always regard that day a sad one."

"Why?"

"Because three-and-twenty years ago, on that very day his present majesty, your own glorious son, was born at the very same hour."

The queen uttered a loud cry, buried her face in her hands, and seemed utterly prostrated for some minutes; but whether from recollections which arose in her mind, or from reflection, or even with sheer pain, was doubtful. La Molina darted a look at Madame de Motteville, so full of bitter reproach, that the poor woman, perfectly ignorant of its meaning, was in her own exculpation, on the point of asking an explanation; when, suddenly, Anne of Austria arose and said, "Yes, the 5th of September; my sorrow began on the 5th of September. The greatest joy, one day; the deepest sorrow the next;—the sorrow," she added, "the bitter expiation of a too excessive joy."

And, from that moment, Anne of Austria, whose memory and reason seemed to be suspended for the time, remained impenetrable, with vacant look, mind almost wandering, and hands hanging heavily down, as if life had almost departed.

"We must put her to bed," said La Molina.

"Presently, Molina."

"Let us leave the queen alone," added the Spanish attendant.

Madame de Motteville rose; large tears were rolling down the queen's pallid face; and Molina, having observed this sign of weakness, fixed her black vigilant eyes upon her.

"Yes, yes," replied the queen. "Leave us, Motteville; go."

The word "us" produced a disagreeable effect upon the ears of the French favorite; for it signified that an interchange of secrets, or of revelations of the past, was about to be made, and that one person was *de trop* in the conversation which seemed likely to take place.

"Will Molina, alone, be sufficient for your majesty to-night?" inquired the French woman.

"Yes," replied the queen. Madame de Motteville bowed in submission, and was about to withdraw, when suddenly, an old female attendant, dressed as if she had belonged to the Spanish court of the year 1620, opened the door, and surprised the queen in her tears. "The remedy!" she cried, delightedly, to the queen, as she unceremoniously approached the group.

"What remedy?" said Anne of Austria.

"For your majesty's sufferings," the former replied.

"Who brings it?" asked Madame de Motteville, eagerly; "Monsieur Vallot?"

"No; a lady from Flanders."

"From Flanders? Is she Spanish?" inquired the queen.

"I don't know."

"Who sent her?"

"M. Colbert."

"Her name?"

"She did not mention it."

"Her position in life?"

"She will answer that herself."

"Who is she?"

"She is masked."

"Go, Molina; go and see!" cried the queen.

"It is needless," suddenly replied a voice, at once firm and gentle in its tone, which proceeded from the other side of the tapestry hangings; a voice which made the attendants start, and the queen tremble excessively. At the same moment, a masked female appeared through the hangings, and, before the queen could speak a syllable she added, "I am connected with the order of the Béguines of Bruges, and do, indeed, bring with me the remedy which is certain to effect a cure of your majesty's complaint." No one uttered a sound, and the Béguine did not move a step.

"Speak," said the queen.

"I will, when we are alone," was the answer.

Anne of Austria looked at her attendants, who immediately withdrew. The Béguine, thereupon, advanced a few steps towards the queen, and bowed reverently before her. The queen gazed with increasing mistrust at this woman, who, in her turn, fixed a pair of brilliant eyes upon her, through her mask.

"The queen of France must, indeed, be very ill," said Anne of Austria, "if it is known at the Béguinage of Bruges that she stands in need of being cured."

"Your majesty is not irremediably ill."

"But tell me how you happen to know I am suffering?"

"Your majesty has friends in Flanders."

"Since these friends, then, sent you, mention their names."

"Impossible, madame, since your majesty's memory has not been awakened by your heart."

Anne of Austria looked up, endeavoring to discover through the mysterious mask, and this ambiguous language, the name of her companion, who expressed herself with such familiarity and freedom; then, suddenly, wearied by a curiosity which wounded every feeling of pride in her nature, she said, "You are ignorant, perhaps, that royal personages are never spoken to with the face masked."

"Deign to excuse me, madame," replied the Béguine, humbly.

"I cannot excuse you. I may, possibly, forgive you, if you throw your mask aside."

"I have made a vow, madame, to attend and aid all afflicted and suffering persons, without ever permitting them to behold my face. I might have been able to administer some relief to your body and to your mind, too; but since your majesty forbids me, I will take my leave. Adieu, madame, adieu!"

These words were uttered with a harmony of tone and respect of manner that disarmed the queen of all anger and suspicion, but did not remove her feeling of curiosity. "You are right," she said; "it ill-becomes those who are suffering to reject the means of relief Heaven sends them. Speak, then; and may you, indeed, be able, as you assert, to administer relief to my body——"

"Let us first speak a little of the mind, if you please," said the Béguine—"of the mind, which I am sure, must also suffer."

"My mind?"

"There are cancers so insidious in their nature that their very pulsations cannot be felt. Such cancers, madame, leave the ivory whiteness of the skin unblemished, and putrify not the firm, fair flesh, with their blue tints; the physician who bends over the patient's chest hears not, though he listens, the insatiable teeth of the disease grinding its onward progress through the muscles, as the blood flows freely on; the knife has never been able to destroy, and rarely, even temporarily, to disarm the rage of these mortal scourges,—their home is in the mind, which they corrupt,—they gnaw the whole heart until it breaks. Such, madame, are the cancers fatal to queens; are you, too, free from their scourge?"

Anne slowly raised her arm, dazzling in its perfect whiteness, and pure in its rounded outlines as it was in the time of her earlier days.

"The evils to which you allude," she said, "are the condition of the lives of the high in rank upon earth, to whom Heaven has imparted mind. When those evils become too heavy to be borne, Heaven lightens their burden by penitence and confession. Thus, only, we lay down our burden and the secrets that oppress us. But, forget not that the same gracious Heaven, in its mercy, apportions to their trials the strength of the feeble creatures of its hand; and my strength has enabled me to bear my burden. For the secrets of others, the silence of Heaven is more than sufficient; for my own secrets, that of my confessor is enough."

"You are as courageous, madame, I see, as ever, against your enemies. You do not acknowledge your confidence in your friends."

"Queens have no friends; if you have nothing further to say to me,—if you feel yourself inspired by Heaven as a prophetess—leave me, I pray, for I dread the future."

"I should have supposed," said the Béguine, resolutely, "that you would rather have dreaded the past."

Hardly had these words escaped her lips, than the queen rose up proudly. "Speak," she cried, in a short imperious tone of voice; "explain yourself briefly, quickly, entirely; or, if not——"

"Nay, do not threaten me, your majesty," said the Béguine, gently; "I came to you full of compassion and respect. I came here on the part of a friend."

"Prove that to me! Comfort, instead of irritating me."

"Easily enough, and your majesty will see who is friendly to you. What misfortune has happened to your majesty during these three-and-twenty years past——"

"Serious misfortunes, indeed; have I not lost the king?"

"I speak not of misfortunes of *that* kind. I wish to ask you, if, since the birth of the king, any indiscretion on a friend's part has caused your majesty the slightest serious anxiety, or distress?"

"I do not understand you," replied the queen, clenching her teeth in order to conceal her emotion.

"I will make myself understood, then. Your majesty remembers, that the king was born on the 5th of September, 1638, at a quarter-past eleven o'clock."

"Yes," stammered out the queen.

"At half-past twelve," continued the Béguine, "the dauphin, who had been baptized by Monseigneur de Meaux in the king's and your own presence, was acknowledged as the heir of the crown of France. The king then went to the chapel of the old Château de Saint-Germain, to hear the *Te Deum* chanted."

"Quite true, quite true," murmured the queen.

"Your majesty's confinement took place in the presence of Monsieur, his majesty's late uncle, of the princes, and

of the ladies attached to the court. The king's physician, Bouvard, and Honoré, the surgeon, were stationed in the antechamber; your majesty slept from three o'clock until seven, I believe."

"Yes, yes; but you tell me no more than every one else knows as well as you and myself."

"I am now, madame, approaching that which very few persons are acquainted with. Very few persons, did I say, alas! I might almost say two only, for formerly there were but five in all, and, for many years past, the secret has been well preserved by the deaths of the principal participators in it. The late king sleeps now with his ancestors; Péronne, the midwife, soon followed him, Laporte is already forgotten."

The queen opened her lips as though about to reply; she felt, beneath her icy hand, with which she kept her face half concealed, the beads of perspiration on her brow.

"It was eight o'clock," pursued the Béguine; "the king was seated at supper, full of joy and happiness; around him on all sides arose wild cries of delight and drinking of healths; the people cheered beneath the balconies; the Swiss guards, the musketeers, and the royal guards wandered through the city, borne about in triumph by the drunken students. Those boisterous sounds of general joy disturbed the dauphin, the future king of France, who was quietly lying in the arms of Madame de Hausac, his nurse, and whose eyes, as he opened them, and stared about, might have observed two crowns at the foot of his cradle. Suddenly, your majesty uttered a piercing cry, and Dame Péronne immediately flew to your bedside. The doctors were dining in a room at some distance from your chamber; the palace, deserted from the frequency of the irruptions made into it, was without either sentinels or guards. The midwife, having questioned and examined your majesty, gave a sudden exclamation as if in wild as-

tonishment, and taking you in her arms, bewildered almost out of her senses from sheer distress of mind, dispatched Laporte to inform the king that her majesty the queen-mother wished to see him in her room. Laporte, you are aware, madame, was a man of the most admirable calmness and presence of mind. He did not approach the king as if he were the bearer of alarming intelligence and wished to inspire the terror he himself experienced; besides, it was not a very terrifying intelligence which awaited the king. Therefore, Laporte appeared with a smile upon his lips, and approached the king's chair, saying to him—'Sire, the queen is very happy, and would be still more so to see your majesty.' On that day, Louis XIII. would have given his crown away to the veriest beggar for a 'God bless you.' Animated, light-hearted, and full of gayety, the king rose from the table, and said to those around him, in a tone that Henry IV. might have adopted,—'Gentlemen, I am going to see my wife.' He came to your bedside, madame, at the very moment Dame Péronne presented to him a second prince, as beautiful and healthy as the former, and said—'Sire, Heaven will not allow the kingdom of France to fall into the female line.' The king, yielding to a first impulse, clasped the child in his arms, and cried, 'Oh! Heaven, I thank Thee!'"

At this part of her recital, the Béguine paused, observing how intensely the queen was suffering; she had thrown herself back in her chair, and with her head bent forward and her eyes fixed, listened without seeming to hear, and her lips moving convulsively, either breathing a prayer to Heaven or imprecations on the woman standing before her.

"Ah! I do not believe that, if, because there could be but one dauphin in France," exclaimed the Béguine, "the queen allowed that child to vegetate, banished from

his royal parents' presence, she was on that account an unfeeling mother. Oh, no, no; there are those alive who know the floods of bitter tears she shed; there are those who have known and witnessed the passionate kisses she imprinted on that innocent creature in exchange for a life of misery and gloom to which state policy condemned the twin brother of Louis XIV."

"Oh! Heaven!" murmured the queen feebly.

"It is admitted," continued the Béguine, quickly, "that when the king perceived the effect which would result from the existence of two sons, equal in age and pretensions, he trembled for the welfare of France, for the tranquillity of the state; and it is equally well known that Cardinal de Richelieu, by the direction of Louis XIII., thought over the subject with deep attention, and after an hour's meditation in his majesty's cabinet, he pronounced the following sentence:—'One prince means peace and safety for the state; two competitors, civil war and anarchy.'"

The queen rose suddenly from her seat, pale as death, and her hands clenched together:—

"You know too much," she said, in a hoarse, thick voice, "since you refer to secrets of state. As for the friends from whom you have acquired this secret, they are false and treacherous. You are their accomplice in the crime which is being now committed. Now, throw aside your mask, or I will have you arrested by my captain of the guards. Do not think that this secret terrifies me! You have obtained it, you shall restore it to me. Never shall it leave your bosom, for neither your secret nor your own life belong to you from this moment."

Anne of Austria, joining gesture to the threat, advanced a couple of steps towards the Béguine.

"Learn," said the latter, "to know and value the fidelity, the honor, and secrecy of the friends you have abandoned." And, then, suddenly threw aside her mask.

"Madame de Chevreuse!" exclaimed the queen.

"With your majesty, the sole living *confidante* of the secret."

"Ah!" murmured Anne of Austria; "come and embrace me, duchesse. Alas! you kill your friend in thus trifling with her terrible distress."

And the queen, leaning her head upon the shoulder of the old duchesse, burst into a flood of bitter tears. "How young you are—still!" said the latter, in a hollow voice; "you can weep!"

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO FRIENDS.

The queen looked steadily at Madame de Chevreuse, and said; "I believe you just now made use of the word 'happy' in speaking of me. Hitherto, duchesse, I had thought it impossible that a human creature could anywhere be found more miserable than the queen of France."

"Your afflictions, madame, have indeed been terrible enough. But by the side of those great and grand misfortunes to which we, two old friends, separated by men's malice, were just now alluding, you possess sources of pleasure, slight enough in themselves it may be, but greatly envied by the world."

"What are they?" said Anne of Austria bitterly. "What can induce you to pronounce the word 'pleasure,' duchesse—you who, just now, admitted that my body and my mind both stood in need of remedies?"

Madame de Chevreuse collected herself for a moment, and then murmured, "How far removed kings are from other people!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that they are so far removed from the vulgar herd they forget that others often stand in need of the bare necessaries of life. They are like the inhabitant of the African mountain, who, gazing from the verdant table-land, refreshed by the rills of melted snow, cannot comprehend that the dwellers in the plains below are perishing from hunger and thirst in the midst of the desert, burnt up by the heat of the sun."

The queen colored, for she now began to perceive the drift of her friend's remark. "It was very wrong," she said, "to have neglected you."

"Oh! madame, I know the king has inherited the hatred his father bore me. The king would exile me if he knew I were in the Palais-Royal."

"I cannot say that the king is very well disposed towards you, duchesse," replied the queen; "but I could—secretly, you know——"

The duchess' disdainful smile produced a feeling of uneasiness in the queen's mind. "Duchesse," she hastened to add, "you did perfectly right to come here, even were it only to give us the happiness of contradicting the report of your death."

"Has it been rumored, then, that I was dead?"

"Everywhere."

"And yet my children did not go into mourning."

"Ah! you know, duchesse, the court is very frequently moving about from place to place; we see M. Albert de Luynes but seldom, and many things escape our minds in the midst of the preoccupations that constantly beset us."

"Your majesty ought not to have believed the report of my death."

"Why not? Alas! we are all mortal; and you may perceive how rapidly I, your younger sister, as we used formerly to say, am approaching the tomb."

"If your majesty believed me dead, you ought, in that

case, to have been astonished not to have received news."

"Death not unfrequently takes us by surprise, duchesse."

"Oh! your majesty, those who are burdened with secrets such as we have just now discussed, must, as a necessity of their nature, satisfy their craving desire to divulge them, and they feel they must gratify that desire before they die. Among the various preparations for their final journey, the task of placing their papers in order is not omitted."

The queen started.

"Your majesty will be sure to learn, in a particular manner, the day of my death."

"In what way?"

"Because your majesty will receive the next day, under several coverings, everything connected with our mysterious correspondence of former times."

"Did you not burn them?" cried Anne, in alarm.

"Traitors only," replied the duchesse, "destroy a royal correspondence."

"Traitors, do you say?"

"Yes, certainly, or rather they pretend to destroy, instead of which they keep or sell it. Faithful friends, on the contrary, most carefully secrete such treasures, for it may happen that some day or other they would wish to seek out their queen in order to say to her: Madame, I am getting old; my health is fast failing me; in the presence of the danger of death, for there is the risk for your majesty that this secret may be revealed, take, therefore, this paper, so fraught with menace for yourself, and trust not to another to burn it for you."

"What paper do you refer to?"

"As far as I am concerned, I have but one, it is true, but that is indeed most dangerous in its nature."

"Oh! duchesse, tell me what it is."

"A letter, dated Tuesday, the 2d of August, 1644, in which you beg me to go to Noisy-le-Sec, to see that unhappy child. In your own handwriting, madame, there are those words, 'that unhappy child!'"

A profound silence ensued; the queen's mind was busy in the past; Madame de Chevreuse was watching the progress of her scheme. "Yes, unhappy, most unhappy!" murmured Anne of Austria; "how sad the existence he led, poor child, to finish it in so cruel a manner."

"Is he dead?" cried the duchesse suddenly, with a curiosity whose genuine accents the queen instinctively detected.

"He died of consumption, died forgotten, died withered and blighted like the flowers a lover has given to his mistress, which she leaves to die secreted in a drawer where she had hid them from the gaze of others."

"Died!" repeated the duchesse with an air of discouragement, which would have afforded the queen the most unfeigned delight, had it not been tempered in some measure with a mixture of doubt—"Died—at Noisy-le-Sec?"

"Yes, in the arms of his tutor, a poor, honest man, who did not long survive him."

"That can easily be understood; it is so difficult to bear up under the weight of such a loss and such a secret," said Madame de Chevreuse,—the irony of which reflection the queen pretended not to perceive. Madame de Chevreuse continued: "Well, madame, I inquired some years ago at Noisy-le-Sec about this unhappy child. I was told that it was not believed he was dead, and that was my reason for not having at first condoled with your majesty; for, most certainly, if I could have thought it were true, never should I have made the slightest allusion

to so deplorable an event, and thus have re-awakened your majesty's most natural distress."

"You say that it is not believed the child died at Noisy?"

"No, madame."

"What did they say about him, then?"

"They said—but, no doubt, they were mistaken——"

"Nay, speak, speak!"

"They said, that one evening, about the year 1645, a lady, beautiful and majestic in her bearing, which was observed notwithstanding the mask and the mantle that concealed her figure—a lady of rank, of very high rank, no doubt—came in a carriage to the place where the road branches off; the very same spot, you know, where I awaited news of the young prince when your majesty was graciously pleased to send me there."

"Well, well?"

"That the boy's tutor, or guardian, took the child to this lady."

"Well, what next?"

"That both the child and his tutor left that part of the country the very next day."

"There, you see there is some truth in what you relate, since, in point of fact, the poor child died from a sudden attack of illness, which makes the lives of all children, as doctors say, suspended as it were by a thread."

"What your majesty says is quite true; no one knows it better than you—no one believes it more strongly than myself. But yet, how strange it is——"

"What can it now be?" thought the queen.

"The person who gave me these details, who was sent to inquire after the child's health——"

"Did you confide such a charge to any one else? Oh, duchesse!"

"Some one as dumb as your majesty, as dumb as my-

self; we will suppose it was myself, madame; this some one, some months after, passing through Touraine——"

"Touraine!"

"Recognized both the tutor and the child, too! I am wrong, thought he recognized them, both living, cheerful, happy, and flourishing, the one in a green old age, the other in the flower of his youth. Judge after that what truth can be attributed to the rumors which are circulated, or what faith, after that, placed in anything that may happen in the world? But I am fatiguing your majesty; it was not my intention, however, to do so, and I will take my leave of you, after renewing to you the assurance of my most respectful devotion."

"Stay, duchesse; let us first talk a little about yourself."

"Of myself, madame! I am not worthy that you should bend your looks upon me."

"Why not, indeed? Are you not the oldest friend I have? Are you angry with me, duchesse?"

"I, indeed! what motive could I have? If I had reason to be angry with your majesty, should I have come here?"

"Duchesse, age is fast creeping on us both; we should be united against that death whose approach cannot be far off."

"You overpower me, madame, with the kindness of your language."

"No one has ever loved or served me as you have done, duchesse."

"Your majesty is too kind in remembering it."

"Not so. Give me a proof of your friendship, duchesse."

"My whole being is devoted to you, madame."

"The proof I require is, that you should ask something of me."

"Ask——"

"Oh, I know you well,—no one is more disinterested, more noble, and truly loyal."

"Do not praise me too highly, madame," said the duchesse, somewhat anxiously.

"I could never praise you as much as you deserve to be praised."

"And yet, age and misfortune effect a terrible change in people, madame."

"So much the better; for the beautiful, the haughty the adored duchesse of former days might have answered me ungratefully, 'I do not wish for anything from you.' Heaven be praised! The misfortunes you speak of have indeed worked a change in you, for you will now, perhaps, answer me, 'I accept.'"

The duchesse's look and smile soon changed at this conclusion, and she no longer attempted to act a false part.

"Speak, dearest, what do you want?"

"I must first explain to you——"

"Do so unhesitatingly."

"Well, then, your majesty can confer the greatest, the most ineffable pleasure upon me."

"What is it?" said the queen, a little distant in her manner, from an uneasiness of feeling produced by this remark. "But do not forget, my good Chevreuse, that I am quite as much under my son's influence as I was formerly under my husband's."

"I will not be too hard, madame."

"Call me as you used to do; it will be a sweet echo of our happy youth."

"Well, then, my dear mistress, my darling Anne——"

"Do you know Spanish, still?"

"Yes."

"Ask me in Spanish, then."

"Will your majesty do me the honor to pass a few days with me at Dampierre?"

"Is that all?" said the queen, stupefied. "Nothing more than that?"

"Good heavens! can you possibly imagine that in asking you that, I am not asking you the greatest conceivable favor. If that really be the case, you do not know me. Will you accept?"

"Yes, gladly. And I shall be happy," continued the queen, with some suspicion, "if my presence can in any way be useful to you."

"Useful!" exclaimed the duchesse, laughing; "oh no, no, agreeable—delightful, if you like; and you promise me, then?"

"I swear it," said the queen, whereupon the duchesse seized her beautiful hand, and covered it with kisses. The queen could not help murmuring to herself, "She is a good-hearted woman, and very generous too."

"Will your majesty consent to wait a fortnight before you come?"

"Certainly; but why?"

"Because," said the duchesse, "knowing me to be in disgrace, no one would lend me the hundred thousand francs, which I require to put Dampierre into a state of repair. But when it is known that I require that sum for the purpose of receiving your majesty at Dampierre properly, all the money in Paris will be at my disposal."

"Ah!" said the queen, gently nodding her head in sign of intelligence, "a hundred thousand francs! you want a hundred thousand francs to put Dampierre into repair?"

"Quite as much as that."

"And no one will lend you them?"

"No one."

"I will lend them to you, if you like, duchesse."

"Oh, I hardly dare accept such a sum."

"You would be wrong if you did *not*. Besides, a hundred thousand francs is really not much. I know but too well that you never set a right value upon your silence and secrecy. Push that table a little towards me, duchesse, and I will write you an order on M. Colbert; no, on M. Fouquet, who is a far more courteous and obliging man."

"Will he pay it, though?"

"If he will not pay it, I will; but it will be the first time he will have refused me."

The queen wrote and handed the duchesse the order, and afterwards dismissed her with a warm embrace.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW LA FONTAINE CAME TO WRITE HIS FIRST TALE.

We now return to Saint-Mandé, where the superintendent was in the habit of receiving his select confederacy of epicureans. For some time past the host had met with nothing but trouble. Every one in the house was aware of and felt for the minister's distress. No more magnificent or recklessly improvident *réunions*. Money had been the pretext assigned by Fouquet, and never *was* any pretext, as Gourville said, more fallacious, for there was not even a shadow of money to be seen.

M. Vatel was resolutely painstaking in keeping up the reputation of the house, and yet the gardeners who supplied the kitchens complained of ruinous delays. The agents for the supply of Spanish wines sent drafts which no one honored; fishermen, whom the superintendent engaged on the coast of Normandy, calculated that if they

were paid all that was due to them, the amount would enable them to retire comfortably for life; fish, which, at a later period, was the cause of Vatel's death, did not arrive at all. However, on the ordinary reception days, Fouquet's friends flocked in more numerously than ever. Gourville and the Abbé Fouquet talked over money matters—that is to say, the abbé borrowed a few pistoles from Gourville; Pélisson, seated with his legs crossed, was engaged in finishing the peroration of a speech with which Fouquet was to open the parliament; and this speech was a masterpiece, because Pélisson wrote it for his friend—that is to say, he inserted all kinds of clever things the latter would most certainly never have taken the trouble to say of his own accord. Presently Loret and La Fontaine would enter from the garden, engaged in a dispute about the art of making verses. The painters and musicians in their turn, were hovering near the dining-room. As soon as eight o'clock struck the supper would be announced, for the superintendent never kept any one waiting. It was already half-past seven and the appetites of the guests were beginning to declare themselves in an emphatic manner. As soon as all the guests were assembled, Gourville went straight up to Pélisson, awoke him out of his reverie, and led him into the middle of a room, and closed the doors. "Well," he said, "anything new?"

Pélisson raised his intelligent and gentle face, and said: "I have borrowed five-and-twenty thousand francs of my aunt, and I have them here in good sterling money."

"Good," replied Gourville; "we only want one hundred and ninety-five thousand livres for the first payment."

"The payment of what?" asked La Fontaine.

"What! absent-minded as usual! Why, it was you who told us the small estate at Corbeil was going to be

sold by one of M. Fouquet's creditors; and you, also, who proposed that all his friends should subscribe—more than that, it was you who said that you would sell a corner of your house at Château-Thierry, in order to furnish your own proportion, and you come and ask—*'The payment of what?'*"

This remark was received with a general laugh, which made La Fontaine blush. "I beg your pardon," he said, "I had not forgotten it; oh, no! only——"

"Only you remembered nothing about it," replied Loret.

"That is the truth, and the fact is, he is quite right; there is a great difference between forgetting and not remembering."

"Well, then," added Pellisson, "you bring your mite in the shape of the price of the piece of land you have sold?"

"Sold? no!"

"Have you not sold the field, then?" inquired Gourville, in astonishment, for he knew the poet's disinterestedness.

"My wife would not let me," replied the latter, at which there were fresh bursts of laughter.

"And yet you went to Château-Thierry for that purpose," said some one.

"Certainly I did, and on horseback."

"Poor fellow!"

"I had eight different horses, and I was almost bumped to death."

"You are an excellent follow! And you rested yourself when you arrived there?"

"Rested! Oh! of course I did, for I had an immense deal of work to do."

"How so?"

"My wife had been flirting with the man to whom I

wished to sell the land. The fellow drew back from his bargain, and so I challenged him."

"Very good, and you fought?"

"It seems not."

"You know nothing about it, I suppose?"

"No, my wife and her relations interfered in the matter. I was kept a quarter of an hour with my sword in my hand; but I was not wounded."

"And your adversary?"

"Oh! he wasn't wounded either, for he never came on the field."

"Capital!" cried his friends from all sides, "you must have been terribly angry."

"Exceedingly so; I caught cold; I returned home and then my wife began to quarrel with me."

"In real earnest?"

"Yes, in real earnest. She threw a loaf of bread at my head, a large loaf."

"And what did you do?"

"Oh! I upset the table over her and her guests; and then I got on my horse again, and here I am."

Every one had great difficulty in keeping his countenance at the exposure of this heroi-comedy, and when the laughter had subsided, one of the guests present said to La Fontaine: "Is that all you have brought back?"

"Oh, no! I have an excellent idea in my head."

"What is it?"

"Have you noticed that there is a good deal of sportive, jesting poetry written in France?"

"Yes, of course," replied every one.

"And," pursued La Fontaine, "only a very small portion of it is printed."

"The laws are strict, you know."

"That may be; but a rare article is a dear article, and that is the reason why I have written a small poem, ex-

cessively free in its style, very broad, and extremely cynical in its tone."

"The deuce you have!"

"Yes," continued the poet, with assumed indifference, "and I have introduced the greatest freedom of language I could possibly employ."

Peals of laughter again broke forth, while the poet was thus announcing the quality of his wares. "And," he continued, "I have tried to excel everything that Boccaccio, Arétin, and other masters of their craft have written in the same style."

"Its fate is clear," said Pelisson; "it will be suppressed and forbidden."

"Do you think so?" said La Fontaine, simply "I assure you I did not do it on my own account so much as on M. Fouquet's."

This wonderful conclusion again raised the mirth of all present.

"And I have sold the first edition of this little book for eight hundred livres," exclaimed La Fontaine, rubbing his hands together. "Serious and religious books sell at about half that rate."

"It would have been better," said Gourville, "to have written two religious books instead."

"It would have been too long, and not amusing enough," replied La Fontaine tranquilly; "my eight hundred livres are in this little bag, and I beg to offer them as *my* contribution."

As he said this, he placed his offering in the hands of their treasurer; it was then Loret's turn, who gave a hundred and fifty livres; the others stripped themselves in the same way; and the total sum in the purse amounted to forty thousand livres. The money was still being counted over when the superintendent noiselessly entered the room; he had heard everything; and then this man,

who had possessed so many millions, who had exhausted all the pleasures and honors the world had to bestow, this generous heart, this inexhaustible brain, which had, like two burning crucibles, devoured the material and moral substance of the first kingdom in Europe, was seen to cross the threshold with tears in his eyes, and pass his fingers through the gold and silver which the bag contained.

"Poor offering," he said, in a softened and affected tone of voice; "you will disappear in the smallest corner of my empty purse, but you have filled to overflowing that which no one can ever exhaust, my heart. Thank you, my friends—thank you." And as he could not embrace every one present, who were all tearful, too, philosophers as they were, he embraced La Fontaine, saying to him "Poor fellow! so you have, on my account, been beaten by your wife and censured by your confessor."

"Oh! it is a mere nothing," replied the poet; "if your creditors will only wait a couple of years, I shall have written a hundred other tales, which, at two editions each, will pay off the debt."

CHAPTER XXIV.

LA FONTAINE IN THE CHARACTER OF A NEGOTIATOR.

Fouquet pressed La Fontaine's hand most warmly, saying to him, "My dear poet, write a hundred other tales, not only for the eighty pistoles which each of them will produce you, but, still more, to enrich our language with a hundred new masterpieces of composition."

"Oh!" said La Fontaine, with a little air of pride, "you must not suppose that I have only brought this idea and the eighty pistoles to the superintendent."

"Oh! indeed," was the general acclamation from all parts of the room; "M. de la Fontaine is in funds to-day."

"Heaven bless the idea, if it only brings us one or two millions," said Fouquet, gayly.

"Exactly," replied La Fontaine.

"Quick, quick!" cried the assembly.

"Take care," said Pélisson in La Fontaine's ear; "you have had a most brilliant success up to the present moment; do not go beyond your depth."

"Not at all, Monsieur Pélisson; and you, who are a man of decided taste, will be the first to approve of what I have done."

"We are talking of millions, remember," said Gourville.

"I have fifteen hundred thousand francs here, Monsieur Gourville," he replied, striking himself on the chest.

"The deuce take this Gascon from Château-Thierry?" cried Loret.

"It is not the pocket you must tap—but the brain," said Fouquet.

"Stay a moment, monsieur le surintendant," added La Fontaine; "you are not procureur-général—you are a poet."

"True, true!" cried Loret, Conrart, and every person present connected with literature.

"You are, I repeat, a poet and a painter, a sculptor, a friend of the arts and sciences; but, acknowledge that you are no lawyer."

"Oh! I do acknowledge it," replied M. Fouquet, smiling.

"If you were to be nominated at the Academy, you would refuse, I think."

"I think I should, with all due deference to the academicians."

"Very good; if therefore you do not wish to belong to

the Academy, why do you allow yourself to form one of the parliament?"

"Oh!" said Pélisson, "we are talking politics."

"I wish to know whether the barrister's gown does or does not become M. Fouquet."

"There is no question of the gown at all," retorted Pélisson, annoyed at the laughter of those who were present.

"On the contrary, it *is* the gown," said Loret.

"Take the gown away from the procureur-général," said Conrart, "and we have M. Fouquet left us still, of whom we have no reason to complain; but, as he is no procureur-général without his gown, we agree with M. de la Fontaine, and pronounce the gown to be nothing but a bugbear."

"*Fugiunt risus leporesque*," said Loret.

"The smiles and the graces," said some one present.

"That is not the way," said Pélisson, gravely, "that I translate *lepores*."

"How do you translate it?" said La Fontaine.

"Thus: The hares run away as soon as they see M. Fouquet." A burst of laughter, in which the superintendant joined, followed this sally.

"But why hares?" objected Conrart, vexed.

"Because the hare will be the very one who will not be ver pleased to see M. Fouquet surrounded by all the attributes which his parliamentary strength and power nfer on him."

"Oh! oh!" murmured the poets.

"*Quo non ascendam*," said Conrart, "seems impossible to me, when one is fortunate enough to wear the gown of le procureur-général."

"On the contrary, it seems so to me without that gown," said the obstinate Pélisson; "what is your opinion, Courville?"

"I think the gown in question is a very good thing," replied the latter; "but I equally think a million and a half is far better than the gown."

"And I am of Gourville's opinion," exclaimed Fouquet, stopping the discussion by the expression of his own opinion, which would necessarily bear down all the others.

"A million and a half," Pélisson grumbled out; "now I happen to know an Indian fable——"

"Tell it me," said La Fontaine; "I ought to know it too."

"Tell it, tell it," said the others.

"There was a tortoise, which was as usual well protected by its shell," said Pélisson; "whenever its enemies threatened it, it took refuge within its covering. One day some one said to it, 'You must feel very hot in such a house as that in the summer, and you are altogether prevented showing off your graces; there is a snake here who will give you a million and a half for your shell.'"

"Good!" said the superintendent, laughing.

"Well, what next?" said La Fontaine, more interested in the apologue than in the moral.

"The tortoise sold his shell and remained naked and defenseless. A vulture happened to see him, and being hungry, broke the tortoise's back with a blow of his beak and devoured it. The moral is, that M. Fouquet should take very good care to keep his gown."

La Fontaine understood the moral seriously. "You forget Æschylus," he said, to his adversary.

"What do you mean?"

"Æschylus was bald-headed, and a vulture—your vulture probably—who was a great amateur in tortoises, mistook at a distance his head for a block of stone, and let a tortoise, which was shrunk up in his shell fall upon it."

"Yes, yes, La Fontaine is right," resumed Fouquet, who had become very thoughtful; "whenever a vulture wishes to devour a tortoise, he well knows how to break his shell; but happy is that tortoise a snake pays a million and a half for his envelope. If any one were to bring me a generous-hearted snake like the one in your fable, Pélisson, I would give him my shell."

"*Rara avis in terris!*" cried Conrart.

"And like a black swan, is he not?" added La Fontaine; "well, then, the bird in question, black and rare, is already found."

"Do you mean to say that you have found a purchaser for my post of procureur-général?" exclaimed Fouquet.

"I have, monsieur."

"But the superindendent never said that he wished to sell," resumed Pélisson.

"I beg your pardon," said Conrart, "you yourself spoke about it, even——"

"Yes, I am a witness to that," said Gourville.

"He seems very tenacious about his brilliant idea," said Fouquet, laughing. "Well, La Fontaine, who is the purchaser?"

"A perfect blackbird, for he is a counselor belonging to the parliament, an excellent fellow."

"What is his name?"

"Vanel."

"Vanel!" exclaimed Fouquet. "Vanel, the husband of——"

"Precisely, her husband; yes, monsieur."

"Poor fellow!" said Fouquet, with an expression of great interest.

"He wishes to be everything that you have been, monsieur," said Gourville, "and to do everything that you have done."

"It is very agreeable; tell us all about it, La Fontaine."

"It is very simple. I see him occasionally, and a short time ago I met him, walking about on the Place de la Bastile, at the very moment when I was about to take the small carriage to come down here to Saint-Mandé."

"He must have been watching his wife," interrupted Loret.

"Oh, no!" said La Fontaine, "he is far from being jealous. He accosted me, embraced me, and took me to the inn called L'Image Saint-Fiacre, and told me all about his troubles."

"He has his troubles, then?"

"Yes; his wife wants to make him ambitious."

"Well, and he told you——"

"That some one had spoken to him about a post in parliament; that M. Fouquet's name had been mentioned; that ever since, Madame Vanel dreams of nothing else than being called Madame la Procureuse-Générale, and that it makes her ill and kills her every night she does not dream about it."

"The deuce!"

"Poor woman!" said Fouquet.

"Wait a moment. Conrart is always telling me that I do not know how to conduct matters of business; you will see how I managed this one."

"Well, go on."

"'I suppose you know,' said I to Vanel, 'that the value of a post such as that which M. Fouquet holds is by no means trifling.'

"'How much do you imagine it to be!' he said.

"'M. Fouquet, I know, has refused seventeen hundred thousand francs.'

"'My wife,' replied Vanel, 'had estimated it at about fourteen hundred thousand.'

"'Ready money?' I said.

"Yes; she has sold some property of hers in Guienne, and has received the purchase money.'"

"That's a pretty sum to touch all at once," said the Abbé Fouquet, who had not hitherto said a word.

"Poor Madame Vanel!" murmured Fouquet.

Pélisson shrugged his shoulders, as he whispered in Fouquet's ear. "That woman is a perfect fiend."

"That may be; and it will be delightful to make use of this fiend's money to repair the injury which an angel has done herself for me."

Pélisson looked with a surprised air at Fouquet, whose thoughts were from that moment fixed upon a fresh object in view.

"Well!" inquired La Fontaine, "what about my negotiation?"

"Admirable, my dear poet."

"Yes," said Gourville; "but there are some people who are anxious to have the steed who have not even money enough to pay for the bridle."

"And Vanel would draw back from his offer if he were to be taken at his word," continued the Abbé Fouquet.

"I do not believe it," said La Fontaine.

"What do you know about it?"

"Why, you have not yet heard the *dénouement* of my story."

"If there is a *dénouement*, why do you beat about the bush so much?"

"*Semper ad eventum.* Is that correct?" said Fouquet, with the air of a nobleman who condescends to barbarisms. To which the Latinists present answered with loud applause.

"My *dénouement*," cried La Fontaine, "is that Vanel, that determined blackbird, knowing that I was coming to Saint Mandé, implored me to bring him with me, and, if possible, to present him to M. Fouquet."

"So that——"

"So that he is here; I left him in that part of the ground called Bel-Air. Well, M. Fouquet, what is your reply?"

"Well, it is not respectful towards Madame Vanel that her husband should run the risk of catching cold outside my house; send for him, La Fontaine, since you know where he is."

"I will go myself."

"And I will accompany you," said the Abbé Fouquet; "I will carry the money bags."

"No jesting," said Fouquet, seriously; "let the business be a serious one, if it is to be one at all. But first of all, let us show we are hospitable. Make my apologies, La Fontaine, to M. Vanel, and tell him how distressed I am to have kept him waiting, but that I was not aware he was there."

La Fontaine set off at once, fortunately accompanied by Gourville, for, absorbed in his own calculations, the poet would have mistaken the route, and was hurrying as fast as he could towards the village of Saint-Mandé. Within a quarter of an hour afterwards, M. Vanel was introduced into the superintendent's cabinet, a description of which has already been given at the beginning of this story. When Fouquet saw him enter, he called to Pélisson, and whispered a few words in his ear. "Do not lose a word of what I am going to say: let all the silver and gold plate, together with my jewels of every description, be packed up in the carriage. You will take the black horses: the jeweler will accompany you; and you will postpone the supper until Madame de Bellière's arrival."

"Will it be necessary to inform Madame de Bellière of it?" said Pélisson.

"No; that will be useless; I will do that So, away with you, my dear friend."

Pélisson set off, not quite clear as to his friend's meaning or intention, but confident, like every true friend, in the judgment of the man he was blindly obeying. It is that which constitutes the strength of such men; distrust only arises in the minds of inferior natures.

Vanel bowed lowly to the superintendent, and was about to begin a speech.

"Do not trouble yourself, monsieur," said Fouquet, politely; "I am told that you wish to purchase a post I hold. How much can you give me for it?"

"It is for you, monseigneur, to fix the amount you require. I know that offers of purchase have already been made to you for it."

"Madame Vanel, I have been told, values it at fourteen hundred thousand livres."

"That is all we have."

"Can you give me the money immediately?"

"I have not the money with me," said Vanel, frightened almost by the unpretending simplicity, amounting to greatness, of the man, for he had expected disputes, difficulties, opposition of every kind.

"When will you be able to bring it?"

"Whenever you please, monseigneur;" for he began to be afraid that Fouquet was trifling with him.

"If it were not for the trouble you would have in returning to Paris, I would say at once; but we will arrange that the payment and the signature shall take place at six o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Very good," said Vanel, as cold as ice, and feeling quite bewildered.

"Adieu, Monsieur Vanel, present my humblest respects to Madame Vanel," said Fouquet, as he rose; upon which Vanel, who felt the blood rushing to his head, for he was quite confounded by his success, said seriously to the

supe[illegible] will you give me your word, monseigneur, upon this affair?"

Fouquet turned round his head, saying, "*Pardieu*, and you, monsieur?

Vanel hesitated, trembled all over, and at last finished by hesitatingly holding out his hand. Fouquet opened and nobly extended his own; this loyal hand lay for a moment in Vanel's moist hypocritical palm, and he pressed it in his own, in order the better to convince himself of the compact. The superintendent gently disengaged his hand, as he again said, "Adieu." And then Vanel left hastily to the door, hurried along the vestibule, and fled as quickly as he could.

CHAPTER XXV.

MADAME DE BELLIÈRE'S PLATE AND DIAMONDS.

FOUQUET had no sooner dismissed Vanel than he began to reflect for a few moments:—"A man never can do too much for the woman he has once loved. Marguerite wishes to be the wife of a procureur-général—and why not confer this pleasure upon her? And, now that the most scrupulous and sensitive conscience will be unable to reproach me with anything, let my thoughts be bestowed on her who has shown so much devotion for me. Madame de Bellière ought to be there by this time," he said, as he turned towards the secret door.

After he had locked himself in, he opened the subterranean passage, and rapidly hastened towards the means of communicating between the house at Vincennes and his own residence. He had neglected to apprise his friend of his approach, by ringing the bell, perfectly assured that she would never fail to be exact at the rendezvous;

as, indeed, was the case, for she was already waiting. The noise the superintendent made aroused her; she ran to take from under the door the letter he had thrust there, and which simply said, "Come, marquise; we are waiting supper for you." With her heart filled with happiness Madame de Bellière ran to her carriage in the Avenue de Vincennes, and in a few minutes she was holding out her hand to Gourville, who was standing at the entrance, where, in order the better to please his master, he had stationed himself to watch her arrival. She had not observed that Fouquet's black horse arrived at the same time, all steaming and foam-flaked, having returned to Saint-Mandé with Pélisson and the very jeweler to whom Madame de Bellière had sold her plate and her jewels. Pélisson introduced the goldsmith into the cabinet, which Fouquet had not yet left. The superintendent thanked him for having been good enough to regard as a simple deposit in his hands, the valuable property which he had had every right to sell; and he cast his eyes on the total of the account, which amounted to thirteen hundred thousand francs. Then, going for a few moments to his desk, he wrote an order for fourteen hundred thousand francs, payable at sight, at his treasury, before twelve o'clock the next day.

"A hundred thousand francs profit!" cried the goldsmith. "Oh, monseigneur, what generosity!"

"Nay, nay, not so, monsieur," said Fouquet, touching him on the shoulder; "there are certain kindnesses which can never be repaid. This profit is only what you have earned; but the interest of your money still remains to be arranged." And, saying this, he unfastened from his sleeve a diamond button, which the goldsmith himself had often valued at three thousand pistoles. "Take this," he said to the goldsmith, "in remembrance of me. Farewell; you are an honest man."

"And you, monseigneur," cried the goldsmith, completely overcome, "are the noblest man that ever lived."

Fouquet let the worthy goldsmith pass out of the room by a secret door, and then went to receive Madame de Bellière, who was already surrounded by all the guests. The marquise was always beautiful, but now her loveliness was more dazzling than ever. "Do you not think, gentlemen," said Fouquet, "that Madame is more than usually beautiful this evening? And do you happen to know why?"

"Because Madame is really the most beautiful of all women," said some one present.

"No; but because she is the best. And yet——"

"Yet?" said the marquise, smiling.

"And yet, all the jewels which Madame is wearing this evening are nothing but false stones." At this remark the marquise blushed most painfully.

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed all the guests, "that can very well be said of one who has the finest diamonds in Paris."

"Well?" said Fouquet to Pélisson, in a low tone.

"Well, at last I have understood you," returned the latter; "and you have done excellently well."

"Supper is ready, monseigneur," said Vatel, with majestic air and tone.

The crowd of guests hurried more quickly than is usually the case with ministerial entertainments, toward the banqueting-room, where a magnificent spectacle presented itself. Upon the buffets, upon the side-tables, upon the supper-table itself, in the midst of flowers and light, glittered most dazzlingly the richest and most costly gold and silver plate that could possibly be seen—relics of those ancient magnificent productions the Florentine artists, whom the Medici family patronized, sculptured, chased, and moulded for the purpose of holding flowers, at a time when gold existed still in France. These hid-

den marvels, which had been buried during the civil wars, timidly reappeared during the intervals of that war of good taste called La Fronde; at a time when noblemen fighting against noblemen, killed, but did not pillage each other. All the plate present had Madame de Bellière's arms engraved upon it. "Look," cried La Fontaine, "here is a P and a B."

But the most remarkable object present was the cover which Fouquet had assigned to the marquise. Near her was a pyramid of diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, antique cameos, sardonyx stones, carved by the old Greeks of Asia Minor, with mountings of Mysian gold; curious mosaics of ancient Alexandria, set in silver; massive Egyptian bracelets lay heaped on a large plate of Palissy ware, supported by a tripod of gilt bronze, sculptured by Benvenuto Cellini. The marquise turned pale, as she recognized what she had never expected to see again. A profound silence fell on every one of the restless and excited guests. Fouquet did not even make a sign in dismissal of the richly liveried servants who crowded like bees round the huge buffets and other tables in the room. "Gentlemen," he said, "all this plate which you behold once belonged to Madame de Bellière, who, having observed one of her friends in great distress, sent all this gold and silver, together with the heap of jewels now before her, to her goldsmith. This noble conduct of a devoted friend can well be understood by such friends as you. Happy indeed is that man who sees himself loved in such a manner. Let us drink to the health of Madame de Bellière."

A tremendous burst of applause followed his words, and made poor Madame de Bellière sink back dumb and breathless in her seat. "And then," added Pélisson, who was always affected by a noble action, as he was invariably impressed by beauty, "let us also drink to the

health of him who inspired Madame's noble conduct; for such a man is worthy of being worthily loved."

It was now the marquise's turn. She rose, pale and smiling; and as she held out her glass with a faltering hand, and her trembling fingers touched those of Fouquet, her look, full of love, found its mirror in that of her ardent and generous-hearted lover. Begun in this manner, the supper soon became a *fête;* no one tried to be witty, but no one failed in being so. La Fontaine forgot his Gorgny wine, and allowed Vatel to reconcile him to the wines of the Rhone, and those from the shores of Spain. The Abbé Fouquet became so kind and good-natured, that Gourville said to him, "Take care, monsieur l'abbé; if you are so tender, you will be carved and eaten."

The hours passed away so joyously, that, contrary to his usual custom, the superintendent did not leave the table before the end of the dessert. He smiled upon his friends, delighted as a man is, whose heart becomes intoxicated before his head—and, for the first time, looked at the clock. Suddenly, a carriage rolled into the court-yard, and, strange to say, it was heard high above the noise of the mirth which prevailed. Fouquet listened attentively, and then turned his eyes towards the ante-chamber. It seemed as if he could hear a step passing across it, a step that, instead of pressing the ground, weighed heavily upon his heart. "M. d'Herblay, bishop of Vannes," the usher announced. And Aramis's grave and thoughtful face appeared upon the threshold of the door, between the remains of two garlands, of which the flame of a lamp had just burnt the thread that once united them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

M. DE MAZARIN'S RECEIPT.

Fouquet would have uttered an exclamation of delight on seeing another friend arrive, if the cold air and averted aspect of Aramis had not restored all his reserve. "Are you going to join us at dessert?" he asked. "And yet you would be frightened, perhaps, at the noise which our wild friends here are making?"

"Monseigneur," replied Aramis, respectfully, "I will begin by begging you to excuse me for having interrupted this merry meeting; and then, I will beg you to give me, as soon as your pleasure is attended to, a moment's audience on matters of business."

As the word "business" had aroused the attention of some of the epicureans present, Fouquet rose, saying: "Business first of all, Monsieur d'Herblay; we are too happy when matters of business arrive only at the end of a meal."

As he said this, he took the hand of Madame de Bellière, who looked at him with a kind of uneasiness, and then led her to an adjoining *salon*, after having recommended her to the most reasonable of his guests. And then, taking Aramis by the arm, he led him towards his cabinet. As soon as Aramis was there, throwing aside the respectful air he had assumed, he threw himself into a chair, saying: "Guess whom I have seen this evening?"

"My dear chevalier, every time you begin in that manner, I am sure to hear you announce something disagreeable."

"Well, and this time you will not be mistaken, either, my dear friend," replied Aramis.

"Do not keep me in suspense," added Fouquet, phlegmatically.

"Well, then, I have seen Madame de Chevreuse."

"The old duchesse, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Her ghost, perhaps?"

"No, no; the old she-wolf herself."

"Without teeth?"

"Possibly, but not without claws."

"Well! what harm can she meditate against me! I am no miser with women who are not prudes. A quality always prized, even by the woman who no longer presumes to look for love."

"Madame de Chevreuse knows very well that you are not avaricious, since she wishes to draw some money of you."

"Indeed! under what pretext?"

"Oh! pretexts are never wanting with *her*. Let me tell you what it is: it seems that the duchesse has a good many letters of M. de Mazarin's in her possession."

"I am not surprised at that, for the prelate was gallant enough."

"Yes, but these letters have nothing whatever to do with the prelate's love affairs. They concern, it is said, financial matters rather."

"And accordingly they are less interesting."

"Do you not suspect what I mean?"

"Not at all."

"Have you never heard speak of a prosecution being instituted for an embezzlement, or appropriation rather, of public funds?"

"Yes, a hundred, nay, a thousand times. Ever since I have been engaged in public matters I have hardly heard

of anything else. It is precisely your own case, when, as a bishop, people reproach you for impiety; or, as a musketeer, for your cowardice; the very thing of which they are always accusing ministers of finance is the embezzlement of public funds."

"Very good; but take a particular instance, for the duchesse asserts that M. de Mazarin alludes to certain particular instances."

"What are they?"

"Something like a sum of thirteen millions of francs, of which it would be very difficult for you to define the precise nature of the employment."

"Thirteen millions!" said the superintendent, stretching himself in his arm-chair, in order to enable him the more comfortably to look up towards the ceiling. "Thirteen millions—I am trying to remember them out of all those I have been accused of having stolen."

"Do not laugh, my dear monsieur, for it is very serious. It is positive that the duchesse has certain letters in her possession, and that these letters must be as she represents them, since she wished to sell them to me for five hundred thousand francs."

"Oh! one can have a very tolerable calumny got up for such a sum as that," replied Fouquet. "Ah! now I know what you mean," and he began to laugh very heartily.

"So much the better," said Aramis, a little reassured.

"I remember the story of those thirteen millions now. Yes, yes, I remember them quite well."

"I am delighted to hear it; tell me about them."

"Well, then, one day Signor Mazarin, heaven rest his soul! made a profit of thirteen millions upon a concession of lands in the Valtelline; he canceled them in the registry of receipts, sent them to me, and then made me advance them to him for war expenses."

"Very good; then there is no doubt of their proper destination."

"No; the cardinal made me invest them in my own name, and gave me a receipt."

"You have the receipt?"

"Of course," said Fouquet, as he quietly rose from his chair, and went to his large ebony bureau inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold."

"What I most admire in you," said Aramis, with an air of great satisfaction, "is, your memory in the first place, then your self-possession, and, finally, the perfect order which prevails in your administration; you of all men, too, who are by nature a poet."

"Yes," said Fouquet, "I am orderly out of a spirit of idleness, to save myself the trouble of looking after things, and so I know that Mazarin's receipt is in the third drawer under the letter M; I open the drawer, and place my hand upon the very paper I need. In the night, without a light, I could find it."

And with a confident hand he felt the bundle of papers which were piled up in the open drawer. "Nay, more than that," he continued, "I remember the paper as if I saw it; it is thick, somewhat crumpled, with gilt edges; Mazarin had made a blot upon the figure of the date. Ah!" he said, "the paper knows we are talking about it, and that we want it very much, and so it hides itself out of the way."

And as the superintendent looked into the drawer, Aramis rose from his seat.

"This is very singular," said Fouquet.

"Your memory is treacherous, my dear monseigneur; look in another drawer."

Fouquet took out the bundle of papers, and turned them over once more; he then grew very pale.

"Don't confine your search to that drawer," said Aramis; "look elsewhere."

"Quite useless; I have never made a mistake; no one but myself arranges any papers of mine of this nature; no one but myself ever opens this drawer, of which, besides, no one, myself excepted, is aware of the secret."

"What do you conclude, then?" said Aramis, agitated.

"That Mazarin's receipt has been stolen from me; Madame de Chevreuse was right, chevalier; I have appropriated the public funds, I have robbed the state coffers of thirteen millions of money; I am a thief, Monsieur d'Herblay."

"Nay, nay, do not get irritated—do not get excited."

"And why not, chevalier? surely there is every reason for it. If legal proceedings are well arranged, and a judgment given in accordance with them, your friend the superintendent will soon follow Montfauçon, his colleague Enguerrand de Marigny, and his predecessor, Semblançay."

"Oh!" said Aramis, smiling, "not so fast as that."

"And why not? why not so fast? What do you suppose Madame de Chevreuse has done with those letters—for you refused them, I suppose?"

"Yes; at once. I suppose that she went and sold them to M. Colbert."

"Well?"

"I said I supposed so; I might have said I was sure of it, for I had her followed, and, when she left me, she returned to her own house, went out by a back door, and proceeded straight to the intendant's house in the street Croix de Petits-Champs."

"Legal proceedings will be instituted, then, scandal and dishonor will follow; and all will fall upon me like a thunderbolt, blindly, pitilessly."

Aramis approached Fouquet, who sat trembling in his

chair, close to the open drawers; he placed his hand on his shoulder, and in an affectionate tone of voice, said: "Do not forget that the position of M. Fouquet can in no way be compared to that of Semblançay or of Marigny."

"And why not, in heaven's name?"

"Because the proceedings against those ministers were determined, completed, and the sentence carried out, whilst in your case the same thing cannot take place."

"Another blow, why not? A peculator is, under any circumstances, a criminal."

"Criminals who know how to find a safe asylum are never in danger."

"What! make my escape? Fly?"

"No, I do not mean that; you forget that all such proceedings originate in the parliament, that they are instituted by the procureur-général, and that you are the procureur-général. You see that unless you wish to condemn yourself——"

"Oh!" cried Fouquet, suddenly, dashing his fist upon the table.

"Well! what? what is the matter?"

"I am procureur-général no longer."

Aramis, at this reply, became as livid as death; he pressed his hands together convulsively, and with a wild, haggard look, which almost annihilated Fouquet, he said, laying a stress upon every distinct syllable, "You are procureur-général no longer, do you say?"

"No."

"Since when?"

"Since the last four or five hours."

"Take care," interrupted Aramis, coldly; "I do not think you are in the full possession of your senses, my friend; collect yourself."

"I tell you," returned Fouquet, "that a little while ago, some one came to me, brought by my friends, to offer me

fourteen hundred thousand francs for the appointment, and that I sold it."

Aramis looked as though he had been struck by lightning; the intelligent and mocking expression of his countenance assumed an aspect of such profound gloom and terror, that it had more effect upon the superintendent than all the exclamations and speeches in the world.

"You had need of money, then?" he said, at last.

"Yes; to discharge a debt of honor." And in a few words, he gave Aramis an account of Madame de Bellière's generosity, and the manner in which he had thought it but right to discharge that act of generosity.

"Yes," said Aramis, "that is, indeed, a fine trait. What has it cost?"

"Exactly the fourteen hundred thousand francs—the price of my appointment."

"Which you received in that manner, without reflection. Oh, imprudent man!"

"I have not yet received the amount, but I shall to-morrow."

"It is not yet completed, then?"

"It must be carried out, though; for I have given the goldsmith, for twelve o'clock to-morrow, an order upon my treasury, into which the purchaser's money will be paid at six or seven o'clock."

"Heaven be praised!" cried Aramis, clapping his hands together, "nothing is yet completed, since you have not yet been paid."

"But the goldsmith?"

"You shall receive the fourteen hundred thousand francs from me, at a quarter before twelve."

"Stay a moment; it is at six o'clock, this very morning, that I am to sign."

"Oh! I will answer that you do not sign."

"I have given my word, chevalier."

"If you have given it, you will take it back again, that is all."

"Can I believe what I hear," cried Fouquet, in a most expressive tone. "Fouquet recall his word, after it has once been pledged!"

Aramis replied to the almost stern look of the minister, by a look full of anger. "Monsieur," he said, "I believe I have deserved to be called a man of honor? As a soldier, I have risked my life five hundred times; as a priest, I have rendered still greater services, both to the state and to my friends. The value of a word, once passed, is estimated according to the worth of the man who gives it. So long as it is in his own keeping, it is of the purest, finest gold; when his wish to keep it has passed away, it is a two-edged sword. With that word, therefore, he defends himself as with an honorable weapon, considering that, when he disregards his word, he endangers his life, and incurs an amount of risk far greater than that which his adversary is likely to derive of profit. In such a case, monsieur, he appeals to Heaven and to justice."

Fouquet bent down his head, as he replied, "I am a poor, self-determined man, a true Breton born; my mind admires and fears yours. I do not say that I keep my word from a proper feeling only; I keep it, if you like, from custom, practice, pride or what you will; but, at all events the ordinary run of men are simple enough to admire this custom of mine; it is my sole good quality—leave me such honor as it confers."

"And so you are determined to sign the sale of the very appointment which can alone defend you against all your enemies."

"Yes, I shall sign."

"You will deliver yourself up, then, bound hand and foot, from a false notion of honor, which the most scrupulous casuists would disdain?"

"I shall sign," repeated Fouquet.

Aramis sighed deeply, and looked all round him with the impatient gesture of a man who would gladly dash something to pieces, as a relief to his feelings. "We have still one means left," he said; "and I trust you will not refuse to make use of that."

"Certainly not, if it be loyal and honorable; as everything is, in fact, which you propose."

"I know nothing more loyal than the renunciation of your purchaser. Is he a friend of yours?"

"Certainly: but,——"

"'But!'—if you allow me to manage the affair, I do not despair."

"Oh! you shall be absolutely master to do what you please."

"Whom are you in treaty with? What manner of man is it?"

"I am not aware whether you know the parliament."

"Most of its members. One of the presidents, perhaps?"

"No; only a counselor, of the name of Vanel."

Aramis became perfectly purple. "Vanel!" he cried, rising abruptly from his seat; "Vanel! the husband of Marguerite Vanel?"

"Exactly."

"Of your former mistress?"

"Yes, my dear fellow; she is anxious to be the wife of the procureur-général. I certainly owed poor Vanel that slight concession, and I am a gainer by it; since I, at the same time, can confer a pleasure on his wife."

Aramis walked up straight to Fouquet, and took hold of his hand. "Do you know," he said, very calmly, "the name of Madame Vanel's new lover?"

"Ah! she has a new lover, then? I was not aware of it; no, I have no idea what his name is."

"His name is M. Jean-Baptiste Colbert; he is intendant

of the finances; he lives in the Rue Croix-des-Petit-Champs, where Madame de Chevreuse has been this evening to take him Mazarin's letters, which she wishes to sell."

"Gracious Heaven!" murmured Fouquet, passing his hand across his forehead, from which the perspiration was starting.

"You now begin to understand, do you not?"

"That I am utterly lost!—yes."

"Do you now think it worth while to be so scrupulous with regard to keeping your word?"

"Yes," said Fouquet.

"These obstinate people always contrive matters in such a way, that one cannot but admire them all the while," murmured Aramis.

Fouquet held out his hand to him, and, at the very moment, a richly ornamented tortoise-shell clock, supported by golden figures, which was standing on a console table opposite to the fireplace, struck six. The sound of a door being opened in the vestibule was heard, and Gourville came to the door of the cabinet to inquire if Fouquet would receive M. Vanel. Fouquet turned his eyes from the gaze of Aramis, and then desired that M. Vanel should be shown in.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MONSIEUR COLBERT'S ROUGH DRAFT.

Vanel, who entered at this stage of the conversation, was nothing less for Aramis and Fouquet than the full stop which completes a phrase. But, for Vanel, Aramis's presence in Fouquet's cabinet had quite another signification; and, therefore, at his first step into the room, he

paused as he looked at the delicate yet firm features of the bishop of Vannes, and his look of astonishment soon became one of scrutinizing attention. As for Fouquet, a perfect politician, that is to say, complete master of himself, he had already, by the energy of his own resolute will, contrived to remove from his face all traces of the emotion which Aramis's revelation had occasioned. He was no longer, therefore, a man overwhelmed by misfortune and reduced to resort to expedients; he held his head proudly erect, and indicated by a gesture that Vanel could enter. He was now the first minister of the state, and in his own palace. Aramis knew the superintendent well; the delicacy of the feelings of his heart and the exalted nature of his mind no longer surprised him. He confined himself, then, for the moment—intending to resume later an active part in the conversation—to the performance of the difficult part of a man who looks on and listens, in order to learn and understand. Vanel was visibly overcome, and advanced into the middle of the cabinet, bowing to everything and everybody. "I am here," he said.

"You are punctual, Monsieur Vanel," returned Fouquet.

"In matters of business, monseigneur," replied Vanel, "I look upon exactitude as a virtue."

"No doubt, monsieur."

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Aramis, indicating Vanel with his finger, but addressing himself to Fouquet; "this is the gentleman, I believe, who has come about the purchase of your appointment?"

"Yes, I am," replied Vanel, astonished at the extremely haughty tone with which Aramis had put the question; "but in what way am I to address you, who do me the honor——"

"Call me monseigneur," replied Aramis, dryly. Vanel bowed.

"Come, gentlemen, a truce to these ceremonies; let us proceed to the matter itself."

"Monseigneur sees," said Vanel, "that I am waiting your pleasure."

"On the contrary, I am waiting," replied Fouquet.

"What for, may I be permitted to ask, monseigneur?"

"I thought that you had perhaps something to say."

"Oh," said Vanel to himself, "he has reflected on the matter, and I am lost." But resuming his courage, he continued, "No, monseigneur, nothing, absolutely nothing more than what I said to you yesterday, and which I am again ready to repeat to you now."

"Come, now, tell me frankly, Monsieur Vanel, is not the affair rather a burdensome one for you?"

"Certainly, monseigneur; fourteen hundred thousand francs is an important sum."

"So important, indeed," said Fouquet, "that I have reflected——"

"You have been reflecting, do you say, monseigneur?" exclaimed Vanel, anxiously.

"Yes; that you might not yet be in a position to purchase."

"Oh, monseigneur!"

"Do not make yourself uneasy on that score, Monsieur Vanel; I shall not blame you for a failure in your word, which evidently may arise from inability on your part."

"Oh, yes, monseigneur, you would blame me, and you would be right in doing so," said Vanel; "for a man must either be very imprudent, or a fool, to undertake engagements which he cannot keep; and I, at least, have always regarded a thing agreed on as a thing actually carried out."

Fouquet colored, while Aramis uttered a "Hum!" of impatience.

"You would be wrong to exaggerate such notions as those, monsieur," said the superintendent; "for a man's

mind is variable, and full of these very excusable caprices, which are, however, sometimes estimable enough; and a man may have wished for something yesterday of which he repents to-day."

Vanel felt a cold sweat trickle down his face. "Monseigneur!" he muttered.

Aramis, who was delighted to find the superintendent carry on the debate with such clearness and precision, stood leaning his arm upon the marble top of a consôle table and began to play with a small gold knife, with a malachite handle. Fouquet did not hasten to reply; but after a moment's pause, "Come, my dear Monsieur Vanel," he said, "I will explain to you how I am situated." Vanel began to tremble.

"Yesterday I wished to sell——"

"Monseigneur did more than wish to sell, he actually sold."

"Well, well, that may be so; but to-day I ask you the favor to restore me my word which I pledged you."

"I received your *word* as a satisfactory assurance that it would be kept."

"I know that, and that is the reason why I now entreat you; do you understand me? I entreat you to restore it to me."

Fouquet suddenly paused. The words "I entreat you," the effect of which he did not immediately perceive, seemed almost to choke him as he uttered it. Aramis, still playing with his knife, fixed a look upon Vanel which seemed as if he wished to penetrate the recesses of his heart. Vanel simply bowed, as he said, "I am overcome, monseigneur, at the honor you do me to consult me upon a matter of business which is already completed; but——"

"Nay, do not say *but*, dear Monsieur Vanel."

"Alas! monseigneur, you see," he said, as he opened a large pocket-book, "I have brought the money with

me,—the whole sum I mean. And here, monseigneur, is the contract of sale which I have just effected of a property belonging to my wife. The order is authentic in every particular, the necessary signatures have been attached to it, and it is made payable at sight; it is ready money, in fact, and, in one word, the whole affair is complete."

"My dear Monsieur Vanel, there is not a matter of business in this world, however important it may be, which cannot be postponed in order to oblige a man, who, by that means, might and would be made a devoted friend."

"Certainly," said Vanel, awkwardly.

"And much more justly acquired would that friend become, Monsieur Vanel, since the value of the service he had received would have been so considerable. Well, what do you say? what do you decide?"

Vanel preserved a perfect silence. In the meantime, Aramis had continued his close observation of the man. Vanel's narrow face, his deeply sunken eyes, his arched eyebrows, had revealed to the bishop of Vannes the type of an avaricious and ambitious character. Aramis's method was to oppose one passion by another. He saw that M. Fouquet was defeated—morally subdued—and so he came to his rescue with fresh weapons in his hands.

"Excuse me, monseigneur," he said; "you forget to show M. Vanel that his own interests are diametrically opposed to this renunciation of the sale."

Vanel looked at the bishop with astonishment; he had hardly expected to find an auxiliary in him. Fouquet also paused to listen to the bishop.

"Do you not see," continued Aramis, "that M. Vanel, in order to purchase your appointment, has been obliged to sell a property which belongs to his wife; well, that is no slight matter; for one cannot displace, as he has done.

fourteen or fifteen hundred thousand francs without some considerable loss, and very serious inconvenience."

"Perfectly true," said Vanel, whose secret Aramis had, with keen-sighted gaze, wrung from the bottom of his heart.

"Inconveniences such as these are matters of great expense and calculation, and whenever a man has money matters to deal with, the expenses are generally the very first thing thought of."

"Yes, yes," said Fouquet, who began to understand Aramis's meaning.

Vanel remained perfectly silent; he, too, had understood him. Aramis observed his coldness of manner and his silence. "Very good," he said to himself, "you are waiting, I see, until you know the amount; but do not fear, I shall send you such a flight of crowns that you cannot but capitulate on the spot."

"We must offer M. Vanel a hundred thousand crowns at once," said Fouquet, carried away by his generous feelings.

The sum was a good one. A prince, even, would have been satisfied with such a bonus. A hundred thousand crowns at that period was the dowry of a king's daughter. Vanel, however, did not move.

"He is a perfect rascal!" thought the bishop, "well, we must offer the five hundred thousand francs at once," and he made a sign to Fouquet accordingly.

"You seem to have spent more than that, dear Monsieur Vanel," said the superintendent. "The price of ready money is enormous. You must have made a great sacrifice in selling your wife's property. Well, what can I have been thinking of? I ought to have offered to sign you an order for five hundred thousand francs; and even in that case I shall feel that I am greatly indebted to you."

There was not a gleam of delight or desire on Vanel's face, which remained perfectly impassible, not a muscle of it changed in the slightest degree. Aramis cast a look almost of despair at Fouquet, and then, going straight up to Vanel and taking hold of him by the coat, in a familiar manner, he said, "Monsieur Vanel, it is neither the inconvenience, nor the displacement of your money, nor the sale of your wife's property even, that you are thinking of at this moment; it is something more important still. I can well understand it; so pay particular attention to what I am going to say."

"Yes, monseigneur." Vanel replied, beginning to tremble in every limb, as the prelate's eyes seem almost ready to devour him.

"I offer you, therefore, in the superintendent's name, not three hundred thousand livres, nor five hundred thousand, but a million. A million—do you understand me?" he added, as he shook him nervously.

"A million!" repeated Vanel, as pale as death.

"A million; in other words, at the present rate of interest, an income of seventy thousand francs!"

"Come, monsieur," said Fouquet, "you can hardly refuse that. Answer—do you accept?"

"Impossible," murmured Vanel.

Aramis bit his lips, and something like a cloud seemed to pass over his face. The thunder behind this cloud could easily be imagined. He still kept his hold on Vanel. "You have purchased the appointment for fifteen hundred thousand francs, I think. Well, you will receive these fifteen hundred thousand francs back again; by paying M. Fouquet a visit, and shaking hands with him on the bargain, you will have become a gainer of a million and a half. You get honor and profit at the same time, Monsieur Vanel."

"I cannot do it," said Vanel, hoarsely.

"Very well," replied Aramis, who had grasped Vanel so tightly by the coat, that when he let go his hold, Vanel staggered back a few paces, "very well; one can now see clearly enough your object in coming here."

"Yes," said Fouquet, "one can easily see that."

"But—" said Vanel, attempting to stand erect before the weakness of these two men of honor.

"Does the fellow presume to speak?" said Aramis, with the tone of an emperor.

"Fellow!" repeated Vanel.

"The scoundrel I meant to say," added Aramis, who had now resumed his usual self-possession. "Come, monsieur, produce your deed of sale,—you have it about you, I suppose, in one of your pockets, already prepared, as an assassin holds his pistol or his dagger concealed under his cloak."

Vanel began to mutter something.

"Enough!" cried Fouquet. "Where is this deed?"

Vanel tremblingly searched in his pockets, and as he drew out his pocket-book, a paper fell out of it, while Vanel offered the other to Fouquet. Aramis pounced upon the paper which had fallen out, as soon as he recognized the handwriting.

"I beg your pardon," said Vanel, "that is a rough draft of the deed."

"I see that very clearly," retorted Aramis, with a smile more cutting than a lash of a whip; "and what I admire most is, that this draft is in M. Colbert's handwriting. Look, monseigneur, look."

And he handed the draft to Fouquet, who recognized the truth of the fact; for, covered with erasures, with inserted words, the margins filled with additions, this deed—a living proof of Colbert's plot—had just revealed everything to its unhappy victim. "Well!" murmured Fouquet.

Vanel, completely humiliated, seemed as if he were looking for some hole wherein to hide himself.

"Well!" said Aramis, "if your name were not Fouquet, and if your enemy's name were not Colbert—if you had not this mean thief before you, I should say to you, 'Repudiate' it; such a proof as this absolves you from your word; but these fellows would think you were afraid; they would fear you less than they do; therefore sign the deed at once." And he held out a pen towards him.

Fouquet pressed Aramis's hand; but, instead of the deed which Vanel handed to him, he took the rough draft of it.

"No, not that paper," said Aramis, hastily; "this is the one. The other is too precious a document for you to part with."

"No, no!" replied Fouquet; "I will sign under M. Colbert's own handwriting even; and I write, 'The handwriting is approved of.'" He then signed, and said, "Here it is, Monsieur Vanel." And the latter seized the paper dashed down the money, and was about to make his escape.

"One moment," said Aramis. "Are you quite sure the exact amount is there? It ought to be counted over Monsieur Vanel; particularly since M. Colbert makes presents of money to ladies, I see. Ah, that worthy M. Colbert is not so generous as M. Fouquet." And Aramis spelling every word, every letter of the order to pay, distilled his wrath and his contempt, drop by drop, upon the miserable wretch, who had to submit to this torture for a quarter of an hour. He was then dismissed, not in words, but by a gesture, as one dismisses or discharges a beggar or a menial.

As soon as Vanel had gone, the minister and the prelate, their eyes fixed on each other, remained silent for a few moments.

"Well," said Aramis, the first to break the silence; "to what can that man be compared, who, at the very moment he is on the point of entering into a conflict with an enemy armed from head to foot, panting for his life, presents himself for the contest utterly defenceless, throws down his arms, and smiles and kisses his hands to his adversary in the most gracious manner? Good faith, M. Fouquet, is a weapon which scoundrels frequently make use of against men of honor, and it answers their purpose. Men of honor, ought, in their turn, also, to make use of dishonest means against such scoundrels. You would soon see how strong they would become, without ceasing to be men of honor."

"What they did would be termed the acts of a scoundrel," replied Fouquet.

"Far from that; it would be merely coquetting or playing with the truth. At all events, since you have finished with this Vanel; since you have deprived yourself of the happiness of confounding him by repudiating your word; and since you have given up, for the purpose of being used against yourself, the only weapon which can ruin you——"

"My dear friend," said Fouquet, mournfully, "you are like the teacher of philosophy whom La Fontaine was telling us about the other day; he saw a child drowning, and began to read him a lecture divided into three heads."

Aramis smiled as he said, "Philosophy—yes; teacher—yes; a drowning child—yes; but a child that can be saved—you shall see. But first of all, let us talk about business. Did you not some time ago," he continued, as Fouquet looked at him with a bewildered air, "speak to me about an idea you had of giving a *fête* at Vaux?"

"Oh!" said Fouquet, "that was when affairs were flourishing."

"A *fête*, I believe, to which the king invited himself of his own accord?"

"No, no, my dear prelate; a *fête* to which M. Colbert advised the king to invite himself."

"Ah—exactly; as it would be a *fête* of so costly a character that you would be ruined in giving it."

"Precisely so. In happier days, as I said just now, I had a kind of pride in showing my enemies how inexhaustible my resources were; I felt it a point of honor to strike them with amazement, by creating millions under circumstances where they imagined nothing but bankruptcies and failures would follow. But, at present, I am arranging my accounts with the state, with the king, with myself; and I must now become a mean, stingy man; I shall be able to prove to the world that I can act or operate with my pence as I used to do with my bags of pistoles, and from to-morrow my equipages shall be sold, my mansions mortgaged, my expenses curtailed."

"From to-morrow," interrupted Aramis, quietly, "you will occupy yourself, without the slightest delay, with your *fête* at Vaux, which must hereafter be spoken of as one of the most magnificent productions of your most prosperous days."

"Are you mad, Chevalier d'Herblay?"

"I! do you think so?"

"What do you mean, then? Do you not know that a *fête* at Vaux, of the very simplest possible character, would cost four or five millions?"

"I do not speak of a *fête* of the very simplest possible character, my dear superintendent."

"But, since the *fête* is to be given to the king," replied Fouquet, who misunderstood Aramis's idea, "it cannot be simple."

"Just so: it ought to be on a scale of the most unbounded magnificence."

"In that case, I shall have to spend ten or twelve millions."

"You shall spend twenty, if you require it," said Aramis, in a perfectly calm voice.

"Where shall I get them?" exclaimed Fouquet.

"That is my affair, monsieur le surintendant; and do not be uneasy for a moment about it. The money shall be placed at once at your disposal, the moment you have arranged the plans of your *fête*."

"Chevalier! chevalier!" said Fouquet, giddy with amazement, "whither are you hurrying me?"

"Across the gulf into which you were about to fall," replied the bishop of Vannes. "Take hold of my cloak, and throw fear aside."

"Why did you not tell me that sooner, Aramis? There was a day when, with one million only, you could have saved me; whilst, to day——"

"Whilst to-day, I can give you twenty," said the prelate. "Such is the case, however—the reason is very simple. On the day you speak of, I had not the million which you had need of at my disposal, whilst now I can easily procure the twenty millions we require."

"May Heaven hear you, and save me!"

Aramis resumed his usual smile, the expression of which was so singular. "Heaven never fails to hear me," he said.

"I abandon myself to you unreservedly," Fouquet murmured.

"No, no; I do not understand it in that manner. I am unreservedly devoted to you. Therefore, as you have the clearest, the most delicate, and the most ingenious mind of the two, you shall have entire control over the *fête*, even to the very smallest details. Only——"

"Only?" said Fouquet, as a man accustomed to understand and appreciate the value of a parenthesis.

"Well, then, leaving the entire invention of the details to you, I shall reserve to myself a general superintendence over the execution."

"In what way?"

"I mean, that you will make of me, on that day, a major-domo, a sort of inspector-general, or factotum—something between a captain of the guard and manager or steward. I will look after the people, and will keep the keys of the doors. You will give your orders, of course: but will give them to no one but me. They will pass through my lips, to reach those for whom they are intended—you understand?"

"No, I am very far from understanding."

"But you agree?"

"Of course, of course, my friend."

"That is all I care about, then. Thanks; and now go and prepare your list of invitations."

"Whom shall I invite?"

"Everybody you know."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN WHICH THE AUTHOR THINKS IT IS HIGH TIME TO RETURN TO THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

Our readers will have observed in this story, the adventures of the new and of the past generation being detailed, as it were, side by side. He will have noticed in the former, the reflection of the glory of earlier years, the experience of the bitter things of this world; in the former, also, that peace which takes possession of the heart, and that healing of the scars which were formerly deep and painful wounds. In the latter, the conflicts of love and

vanity; bitter disappointments, ineffable delights; life instead of memory. If, therefore, any variety has been presented to the reader in the different episodes of this tale, it is to be attributed to the numerous shades of color which are presented on this double tablet, where two pictures are seen side by side, mingling and harmonizing their severe and pleasing tones. The repose of the emotions of one is found in harmonious contrast with the fiery sentiments of the other. After having talked reason with older heads, one loves to talk nonsense with youth. Therefore, if the threads of the story do not seem very intimately to connect the chapter we are now writing with the one we have just written, we do not intend to give ourselves any more thought or trouble about it than Ruysdaël took in painting an autumn sky, after having finished a spring-time scene. We accordingly resume Raoul de Bragelonne's story at the very place where our last sketch left him.

In a state of frenzy and dismay, or rather without power or will of his own—hardly knowing what he was doing,—he fled swiftly, after the scene in La Vallière's room. The king, Montalais, Louise, that chamber, that strange exclusion, Louise's grief, Montalais's terror, the king's wrath—all seemed to indicate some misfortune. But what? He had arrived from London because he had been told of the existence of a danger; and almost on his arrival this appearance of danger was manifest. Was not this sufficient for a lover? certainly it was, but it was insufficient for a pure and upright heart such as his. And yet Raoul did not seek for explanations in the very quarter where more jealous or less timid lovers would have done. He did not go straightway to his mistress, and say, "Louise, is it true that you love me no longer? Is it true that you love another?" Full of courage, full of friendship as he was full of love; a religious observer of his word, and believing

blindly the word of others, Raoul said within himself, "Guiche wrote to put me on my guard, Guiche knows something; I will go and ask Guiche what he knows, and tell him what I have seen." The journey was not a long one. Guiche, who had been brought from Fontainebleau to Paris within the last two days, was beginning to recover from his wound, and to walk about a little in his room. He uttered a cry of joy as he saw Raoul, with the eagerness of friendship, enter the apartment. Raoul was unable to refrain from a cry of grief, when he saw De Guiche, so pale, so thin, so melancholy. A very few words, and a simple gesture which De Guiche made to put aside Raoul's arm, were sufficient to inform the latter of the truth.

"Ah! so it is," said Raoul, seating himself beside his friend; "one loves and dies."

"No, no, not dies," replied Guiche, smiling, "since I am now recovering, and since, too, I can press you in my arms."

"Ah! I understand."

"And I understand you, too. You fancy I am unhappy, Raoul?"

"Alas!"

"No; I am the happiest of men. My body suffers, but not my mind or my heart. If you only knew—— Oh! I am, indeed, the very happiest of men."

"So much the better," said Raoul; "so much the better, provided it lasts."

"It is over. I have had enough happiness to last me to my dying day, Raoul."

"I have no doubt you have had; but she——"

"Listen; I love her, because—but you are not listening to me."

"I beg your pardon."

"Your mind is preoccupied."

"Yes, your health, in the first place——"

"It is not that, I know."

"My dear friend, you would be wrong, I think, to ask me any questions—*you* of all persons in the world;" and he laid so much weight upon the "you," that he completely enlightened his friend upon the nature of the evil, and the difficulty of remedying it.

"You say that, Raoul, on account of what I wrote to you."

"Certainly. We will talk over that matter a little, when you have finished telling me of all your own pleasures and your pains."

"My dear friend, I am entirely at your service."

"Thank you; I have hurried, I have flown here; I came in half the time the government couriers usually take. Now, tell me, my dear friend, what did you want?"

"Nothing whatever, but to make you come."

"Well, then, I am here."

"All is quite right, then."

"There must have been something else, I suppose?"

"No, indeed."

"De Guiche!"

"Upon my honor!"

"You cannot possibly have crushed all my hopes so violently, or have exposed me to being disgraced by the king for my return, which is in disobedience of his orders —you cannot, I say, have planted jealousy in my heart, merely to say to me, 'It is all right, be perfectly easy?'"

"I do not say to you, Raoul, 'Be perfectly easy;' but pray understand me; I never will, nor can I, indeed, tell you anything else."

"What sort of person do you take me for?"

"What do you mean?"

"If you know anything, why conceal it from me? If

you do not know anything, why did you write so warningly?"

"True, true, I was very wrong, and I regret having done so, Raoul. It seems nothing to write to a friend and say 'Come;' but to have this friend face to face, to feel him tremble, and breathlessly and anxiously wait to hear what one hardly dare tell him, is very different."

"Dare! I have courage enough, if you have not," exclaimed Raoul, in despair.

"See how unjust you are, and how soon you forget you have to do with a poor wounded fellow such as your unhappy friend is. So, calm yourself, Raoul. I said to you, 'Come'—you are here, so ask me nothing further."

"Your object in telling me to come was your hope that I should see with my own eyes, was it not? Nay, do not hesitate, for I have seen all."

"Oh!" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Or at least, I thought——"

"There now, you see you are not sure. But if you have any doubt, my poor friend, what remains for me to do?"

"I saw Louise much agitated—Montalais in a state of bewilderment—the king——"

"The king?"

"Yes. You turn your head aside. The danger is there, the evil is there; tell me, is it not so, is it not the king?"

"I say nothing."

"Oh! you say a thousand times more than nothing. Give me facts, for pity's sake, give me proofs. My friend, the only friend I have, speak—tell me all. My heart is crushed, wounded to death; I am dying from despair."

"If that really be so, as I see it is, indeed, dear Raoul," replied De Guiche, "you relieve me from my difficulty, and I will tell you all, perfectly sure that I can tell you

nothing but what is consoling, compared to the despair from which I see you suffering."

"Go on,—go on; I am listening."

"Well, then, I can only tell you what you might learn from every one you meet."

"From every one, do you say? It is talked about, then!"

"Before you say people talk about it, learn what it is that people have to talk about. I assure you solemnly, that people only talk about what may, in truth, be very innocent; perhaps a walk——"

"Ah! a walk with the king?"

"Yes, certainly a walk with the king; and I believe the king has already very frequently before taken walks with ladies, without on that account——"

"You would not have written to me, shall I say again, if there had been nothing unusual in this promenade."

"I knew that while the storm lasted, it would have been far better if the king had taken shelter somewhere else, than to have remained with his head uncovered before La Vallière; but the king is so very courteous and polite."

"Oh! De Guiche, De Guiche, you are killing me!"

"Do not let us talk any more, then."

"Nay, let us continue. This walk was followed by others, I suppose?"

"No—I mean yes; there was the adventure of the oak, I think. But I know nothing about the matter at all." Raoul rose; De Guiche endeavored to imitate him, notwithstanding his weakness. "Well, I will not add another word: I have said either too much or not enough. Let others give you further information if they will, or if they can; my duty was to warn you, and *that* I have done. Watch over your own affairs now, yourself."

"Question others! Alas! you are no true friend to

speak to me in that manner," said the young man, in utter distress. "The first man I meet may be either evilly disposed, or a fool,—if the former, he will tell me a lie to make me suffer more than I do now; if the latter, he will do worse still. Ah! De Guiche, De Guiche, before two hours are over, I shall have been told ten falsehoods, and shall have as many duels on my hands. Save me, then, is it not best to know the worst always?"

"But I know nothing, I tell you; I was wounded, attacked by fever: out of my senses; and I have only a very faint recollection of it all. But there is no reason why we should search very far, when the very man we want is close at hand. Is not D'Artagnan your friend?"

"Oh! true, true!"

"Go to him, then. He will be able to throw sufficient light upon the subject." At this moment a lackey entered the room. "What is it?" said De Guiche.

"Some one is waiting for monseigneur in the Cabinet des Porcelaines."

"Very well. Will you excuse me, my dear Raoul? I am so proud since I have been able to walk again."

"I would offer you my arm, De Guiche, if I did not guess that the person in question is a lady."

"I believe so," said De Guiche, smiling as he quitted Raoul.

Raoul remained motionless, absorbed in grief, overwhelmed, like the miner upon whom a vault has just fallen in, who, wounded, his life-blood welling fast, his thoughts confused, endeavors to recover himself, to save his life and to retain his reason. A few minutes were all Raoul needed to dissipate the bewildering sensations occasioned by these two revelations. He had already recovered the thread of his ideas, when, suddenly, through the door, he fancied he recognized Montalais's voice in the Cabinet des Porcelaines. "She!" he cried. "Yes, it is

indeed her voice! She will be able to tell me the whole truth; but shall I question her here? She conceals herself even from me; she is coming no doubt from Madame. I will see her in her own apartment. She will explain her alarm, her flight, the strange manner in which I was driven out; she will tell me all that—after M. d'Artagnan, who knows everything, shall have given me fresh strength and courage. Madame, a coquette I fear, and yet a coquette who is herself in love, has her moments of kindness; a coquette who is as capricious and uncertain as life or death, but who tells De Guiche that he is the happiest of men. He at least is lying on roses." And so he hastily quitted the comte's apartments, reproaching himself as he went for having talked of nothing but his own affairs to De Guiche, and soon reached D'Artagnan's quarters.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BRAGELONNE CONTINUES HIS INQUIRIES.

The captain, sitting buried in his leathern arm-chair, his spurs fixed in the floor, his sword between his legs, was reading a number of letters, as he twisted his mustache. D'Artagnan uttered a welcome full of pleasure when he perceived his friend's son. "Raoul, my boy," he said, "by what lucky accident does it happen that the king has recalled you?"

These words did not sound agreeably in the young man's ears, who, as he seated himself, replied, "Upon my word I cannot tell you; all that I know is—I have come back."

"Hum!" said D'Artagnan, folding up his letters and directing a look full of meaning at him; "what do you

say, my boy? that the king has not recalled you, and you have returned? I do not understand that at all."

Raoul was already pale enough; and he now began to turn his hat round and round in his hand.

"What the deuce is the matter that you look as you do, and what makes you so dumb?" said the captain. "Do people nowadays assume that sort of airs in England? I have been in England, and came home again as lively as a chaffinch. Will you not say something?"

"I have too much to say."

"Ah! how is your father?"

"Forgive me, my dear friend, I was going to ask you that."

D'Artagnan increased the sharpness of his penetrating gaze, which no secret was capable of resisting. "You are unhappy about something," he said.

"I am, indeed; and you know the reason very well, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"I?"

"Of course. Nay, do not pretend to be astonished."

"I am not pretending to be astonished, my friend."

"Dear captain, I know very well that in all trials of *finesse*, as well as in all trials of strength, I shall be beaten by you. You can see that at the present moment I am an idiot, an absolute noodle. I have neither head nor arm do not despise but help me. In two words, I am the most wretched of living beings."

"Oh! oh! why that?" inquired D'Artagnan, unbuckling his belt and thawing the asperity of his smile.

"Because Mademoiselle de la Vallière is deceiving me."

"She is deceiving you," said D'Artagnan, not a muscle of whose face had moved; "those are big words. Who makes use of them?"

"Every one."

"Ah! if every one says so, there must be some truth in

it. I begin to believe there is fire when I see smoke. It is ridiculous, perhaps, but so it is."

"Therefore you *do* believe?" exclaimed Bragelonne, quickly.

"I never mix myself up in affairs of that kind; you know that very well."

"What! not for a friend, for a son!"

"Exactly. If you were a stranger, I should tell you—I will tell *you* nothing at all. How is Porthos, do you know?"

"Monsieur," cried Raoul, pressing D'Artagnan's hand, "I entreat you in the name of the friendship you vowed my father!"

"The deuce take it, you are really ill—from curiosity."

"No, it is not from curiosity, it is from love."

"Good. Another big word. If you were really in love, my dear Raoul, you would be very different.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if you were really so deeply in love that I could believe I was addressing myself to your heart—but it is impossible."

"I tell you I love Louise to distraction."

D'Artagnan could read to the very bottom of the young man's heart.

"Impossible, I tell you," he said. "You are like all young men; you are not in love, you are out of your senses."

"Well! suppose it were only that?"

"No sensible man ever succeeded in making much of a brain when the head was turned. I have completely lost my senses in the same way a hundred times in my life. You would listen to me, but you would not hear me! you would hear, but you would not understand me; you would understand, but you would not obey me."

"Oh! try, try."

"I go far. Even if I were unfortunate enough to know something, and foolish enough to communicate it to you—— You are my friend, you say?"

"Indeed, yes."

"Very good. I should quarrel with you. You would never forgive me for having destroyed your illusion, as people say in love affairs."

"Monsieur D'Artagnan, you know all; and yet you plunge me in perplexity and despair, in death itself."

"There, there now."

"I never complain, as you know; but as Heaven and my father would never forgive me for blowing out my brains, I will go and get the first person I meet to give me the information which you withhold; I will tell him he lies, and——"

"And you would kill him. And a fine affair that would be. So much the better. What should I care? Kill any one you please, my boy, if it gives you any pleasure. It is exactly like a man with a toothache, who keeps on saying, 'Oh! what torture I am suffering. I could bite a piece of iron in half.' My answer always is, 'Bite, my friend, bite; the tooth will remain all the same.'"

"I shall not kill any one, monsieur," said Raoul, gloomily.

"Yes, yes! you now assume a different tone: instead of killing, you will get killed yourself, I suppose you mean? Very fine, indeed! How much I should regret you! Of course I should go about all day, saying, 'Ah! what a fine stupid fellow that Bragelonne was! as great a stupid as I ever met with. I have passed my whole life almost in teaching him how to hold and use his sword properly, and the silly fellow has got himself spitted like a lark.' Go, then, Raoul, go and get yourself disposed of, if you like. I hardly know who can have taught you

logic, but deuce take me if your father has not been regularly robbed of his money."

Raoul buried his face in his hands, murmuring: "No, no; I have not a single friend in the world."

"Oh! bah!" said D'Artagnan.

"I meet with nothing but raillery or indifference."

"Idle fancies, monsieur. I do not laugh at you, although I am a Gascon. And, as for being indifferent, if I were so, I should have sent you about your business a quarter of an hour ago, for you would make a man who was out of his senses with delight as dull as possible, and would be the death of one who was out of spirits. How now, young man! do you wish me to disgust you with the girl you are attached to, and to teach you to execrate the whole sex who constitute the honor and happiness of human life?"

"Oh! tell me, monsieur, and I will bless you."

"Do you think, my dear fellow, that I can have crammed into my brain all about the carpenter, and the painter, and the staircase, and a hundred other similar tales of the same kind?"

"A carpenter! what do you mean?"

"Upon my word, I don't know; some one told me there was a carpenter who made an opening through a certain flooring."

"In La Vallière's room!"

"Oh! I don't know where."

"In the king's apartment, perhaps?"

"Of course, if it were in the king's apartment, I should tell you, I suppose."

"In whose room then?"

"I have told you for the last hour that I know nothing of the whole affair.

"But the painter, then? the portrait——"

"It seems that the king wished to have the portrait of one of the ladies belonging to the court."

"La Vallière?"

"Why you seem to have only that name in your mouth. Who spoke to you of La Vallière?"

"If it be not her portrait, then, why do you suppose it would concern me?"

"I do not suppose it will concern you. But you ask me all sorts of questions, and I answer you. You positively will learn all the scandal of the affair, and I tell you—make the best you can of it."

Raoul struck his forehead with his hand, in utter despair. "It will kill me!" he said.

"So you have said already."

"Yes, you are right," and he made a step or two as if he were going to leave.

"Where are you going?"

"To look for some one who will tell me the truth."

"Who is that?"

"A woman."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière herself, I suppose you mean?" said D'Artagnan, with a smile. "Ah! a famous idea that! You wish to be consoled by some one, and you will be so at once. She will tell you nothing ill of herself, of course. So be off."

"You are mistaken, monsieur," replied Raoul; "the woman I mean will tell me all the evil she possibly can."

"You allude to Montalais, I suppose—her friend; a woman who, on that account, will exaggerate all that is either bad or good in the matter. Do not talk to Montalais, my good fellow."

"You have some reasons for wishing me not to talk with Montalais?"

"Well, I admit it. And, in point of fact, why should I play with you as a cat does with a poor mouse? You

distress me, you do indeed. And if I wish you not to speak to Montalais just know, it is because you will be betraying your secret, and people will take advantage of it. Wait, if you can."

"I cannot."

"So much the worse. Why, you see, Raoul, if I had an idea,—but I have not got one."

"Promise that you will pity me, my friend, that is all I need, and leave me to get out of the affair by myself."

"Oh! yes, indeed, in order that you may get deeper into the mire! A capital idea, truly! go and sit down at that table and take a pen in your hand."

"What for?"

"To write and ask Montalais to give you an interview."

"Ah!" said Raoul, snatching eagerly at the pen which the captain held out to him.

Suddenly the door opened, and one of the musketeers approaching D'Artagnan, said, "Captain, Mademoiselle de Montalais is here, and wishes to speak to you."

"To me?" murmured D'Artagnan. "Ask her to come in; I shall soon see," he said to himself, "whether she wishes to speak to me or not."

The cunning captain was quite right in his suspicions; for as soon as Montalais entered she exclaimed, "Oh, monsieur! monsieur! I beg your pardon, Monsieur D'Artagnan."

"Oh! I forgive you, mademoiselle," said D'Artagnan; "I know that, at my age, those who are looking for me generally need me for something or another."

"I was looking for M. de Bragelonne," replied Montalais.

"How very fortunate that is; he was looking for you too. Raoul, will you accompany Mademoiselle Montalais?"

"Oh! certainly."

"Go along, then," he said, as he gently pushed Raoul out of the cabinet; and then, taking hold of Montalais's hand, he said, in a low voice, "Be kind towards him; spare him, and spare her, too, if you can."

"Ah!" she said, in the same tone of voice, it is not I who am going to speak to him."

"Who, then?"

"It is Madame who has sent for him."

"Very good," cried D'Artagnan, "it is Madame, is it? In an hour's time, then, the poor fellow will be cured."

"Or else dead," said Montalais, in a voice full of compassion. "Adieu, Monsieur D'Artagnan," she said; and she ran to join Raoul, who was waiting for her at a little distance from the door, very much puzzled and thoroughly uneasy at the dialogue, which promised no good augury for him.

CHAPTER XXX.

TWO JEALOUSIES.

Lovers are tender towards everything that forms part of the daily life of the object of their affection. Raoul no sooner found himself alone with Montalais, than he kissed her hand with rapture. "There, there," said the young girl, sadly, "you are throwing your kisses away; I will guarantee that they will not bring you back any interest."

"How so?—Why?—Will you explain to me, my dear Aure?"

"Madame will explain everything to you. I am going to take you to her apartments."

"*What!*"

"Silence! and throw away your dark and savage looks.

The windows here have eyes, the walls have ears. Have the kindness not to look at me any longer; be good enough to speak to me aloud of the rain, of the fine weather, and of the charms of England."

"At all events——" interrupted Raoul.

"I tell you, I warn you, that wherever people may be, I know not how, Madame is sure to have eyes and ears open. I am not very desirous, you can easily believe, of being dismissed or thrown into the Bastile. Let us talk, I tell you, or rather, do not let us talk at all."

Raoul clenched his hands, and tried to assume the look and gait of a man of courage, it is true, but of a man of courage on his way to the torture chamber. Montalais, glancing in every direction, walking along with an easy swinging gait, and holding up her head pertly in the air, preceded him to Madame's apartments, where he was at once introduced. "Well," he thought, "this day will pass away without my learning anything. Guiche showed too much consideration for my feelings; he had no doubt come to an understanding with Madame, and both of them, by a friendly plot, agreed to postpone the solution of the problem. Why have I not a determined, inveterate enemy—that serpent, De Wardes, for instance; that he would bite, is very likely; but I should not hesitate any more. To hesitate, to doubt—better, far, to die."

The next moment Raoul was in Madame's presence. Henrietta, more charming than ever, was half lying, half reclining in her arm-chair, her small feet upon an embroidered velvet cushion; she was playing with a kitten with long silky fur, which was biting her fingers and hanging by the lace of her collar.

Madame seemed plunged in deep thought, so deep indeed, that it required both Montalais and Raoul's voice to disturb her from her reverie.

"Your highness sent for me?" repeated Raoul.

Madame shook her head, as if she were just awakening, and then said, "Good-morning, Monsieur de Bragelonne; yes, I sent for you; so you have returned from England?"

"Yes, madame, and am at your royal highness's commands."

"Thank you; leave us, Montalais," and the latter immediately left the room.

"You have a few minutes to give me, Monsieur de Bragelonne, have you not?"

"My life is at your royal highness's disposal," Raoul returned with respect, guessing that there was something serious in these unusual courtesies; nor was he displeased indeed, to observe the seriousness of her manner, feeling persuaded that there was some sort of affinity between Madame's sentiments and his own. In fact, every one at court of any perception at all, knew perfectly well the capricious fancy and absurd despotism of the princess's singular character. Madame had been flattered beyond all bounds by the king's attention; she had made herself talked about; she had inspired the queen with that mortal jealousy which is the stinging scorpion at the heel of every woman's happiness; Madame, in a word, in her attempts to cure a wounded pride, found that her heart had become deeply and passionately attached. We know what Madame had done to recall Raoul, who had been sent out of the way by Louis XIV. Raoul did not know of her letter to Charles II., although D'Artagnan had guessed its contents. Who will undertake to account for that seemingly inexplicable mixture of love and vanity, that passionate tenderness of feeling, that prodigious duplicity of conduct? No one can, indeed; not even the bad angel who kindles the love of coquetry in the heart of woman. "Monsieur de Bragelonne," said the princess, after a moment's pause, "have you returned satisfied?"

Bragelonne looked at Madame Henrietta, and seeing

ow pale she was, not alone from what she was keeping back, but also from what she was burning to say, said: Satisfied! what is there for me to be satisfied or dissatisfied about, madame?"

"But what are those things with which a man of your age, and of your appearance, is usually either satisfied or dissatisfied?"

"How eager she is," thought Raoul, almost terrified; what venom is it she is going to distil into my heart?" nd then, frightened at what she might possibly be going o tell him, and wishing to put off the opportunity of aving everything explained, which he had hitherto so ardently wished for, yet had dreaded so much, he replied: I left, madame, a dear friend in good health, and on my eturn I find him very ill."

"You refer to M. de Guiche," replied Madame Henrietta, with imperturbable self-possession; "I *have* heard e is a very dear friend of yours."

"He is, indeed, madame."

"Well, it is quite true he has been wounded; but he better now. Oh! M. de Guiche is not to be pitied," he said hurriedly; and then recovering herself, added: But has he anything to complain of? Has he complained of anything? is there any cause of grief or sorrow hat we are not acquainted with?"

"I allude only to his wound, madame."

"So much the better, then, for, in other respects, M. e Guiche seems to be very happy; he is always in very igh spirits. I am sure that you, Monsieur de Bragelonne, would far prefer to be, like him, wounded only in the ody. . . for what, indeed, is such a wound, after all!"

Raoul started. "Alas!" he said to himself, "she is eturning to it."

"What did you say?" she inquired.

"I did not say anything, madame."

"You did not say anything; you disapprove of my observation, then? you are perfectly satisfied, I suppose?"

Raoul approached closer to her. "Madame," he said, "your royal highness wishes to say something to me, and your instinctive kindness and generosity of disposition induce you to be careful and considerate as to your manner of conveying it. Will your royal highness throw this kind forbearance aside? I am able to bear everything; and I am listening."

"Ah! replied Henrietta, "what do you understand, then?"

"That which your royal highness wishes me to understand," said Raoul, trembling, notwithstanding his command over himself, as he pronounced these words.

"In point of fact," murmured the princess . . . "it seems cruel, but since I have begun——"

"Yes, madame, once your highness has deigned to begin, will you condescend to finish——"

Henrietta rose hurriedly and walked a few paces up and down her room. "What did M. de Guiche tell you?" she said, suddenly.

"Nothing, madame."

"Nothing! Did he say nothing? Ah! how well I recognize him in that."

"No doubt he wished to spare me."

"And that is what friends call friendship. But surely, M. d'Artagnan, whom you have just left, must have told you."

"No more than De Guiche, madame."

Henrietta made a gesture full of impatience, as she said, "At least, you know all the court knows."

"I know nothing at all, madame."

"Not the scene in the storm?"

"No, madame."

"Not the *tête-à-tête* in the forest?"

"No, madame."

"Nor the flight to Chaillot?"

Raoul, whose head dropped like a blossom cut down by the reaper, made an almost superhuman effort to smile, as he replied with the greatest gentleness: "I have had the honor of telling your royal highness that I am absolutely ignorant of everything, that I am a poor unremembered outcast, who has this moment arrived from England. There have rolled so many stormy waves between myself and those I left behind me here, that the rumor of none of the circumstances your highness refers to, has been able to reach me."

Henrietta was affected by his extreme pallor, his gentleness, and his great courage. The principal feeling in her heart at that moment was an eager desire to hear the nature of the remembrance which the poor lover retained of the woman who had made him suffer so much. "Monsieur de Bragelonne," she said, "that which your friends have refused to do, I will do for you, whom I like and esteem very much. I will be your friend on this occasion. You hold your head high, as a man of honor should; and I deeply regret that you may have to bow before ridicule, and in a few days, it might be, contempt."

"Ah!" exclaimed Raoul, perfectly livid. "It is as bad as that, then?"

"If you do not know," said the princess, "I see that you guess; you were affianced, I believe, to Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Yes, madame."

"By that right, then, you deserve to be warned about her, as some day or another I shall be obliged to dismiss Mademoiselle de la Vallière from my service——"

"Dismiss La Vallière!" cried Bragelonne.

"Of course. Do you suppose I shall always be amen able to the tears and protestations of the king? No, no my house shall no longer be made a convenience for such practices; but you tremble, you cannot stand——"

"No, madame, no," said Bragelonne, making an effor over himself; "I thought I should have died just now that was all. Your royal highness did me the honor to say that the king wept and implored you——"

"Yes, but in vain," returned the princess; who then related to Raoul the scene that took place at Chaillot and the king's despair on his return; she told him of his indulgence to herself and the terrible word with which the outraged princess, the humiliated coquette, had quashed the royal anger.

Raoul stood with his head bent down.

"What do you think of it all?" she said.

"The king loves her," he replied.

"But you seem to think she does not love him!"

"Alas, madame, I was thinking of the time when she loved *me*."

Henrietta was for a moment struck with admiration at this sublime disbelief: and then, shrugging her shoulders she said, "You do not believe me, I see. How deeply you must love her. And you doubt if she loves the king?"

"I do, until I have a proof of it. Forgive me, madame but she has given me her word; and her mind and heart are too upright to tell a falsehood."

"You require a proof! Be it so. Come with me then."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A DOMICILIARY VISIT.

The princess, preceding Raoul, led him through the court-yard toward that part of the building La Vallière inhabited, and, ascending the same staircase which Raoul himself had ascended that very morning, she paused at the door of the room in which the young man had been so strangely received by Montalais. The opportunity was remarkably well chosen to carry out the project Madame Henrietta had conceived, for the château was empty. The king, the courtiers, and the ladies of the court, had set off for Saint-Germain; Madame Henrietta was the only one who knew of Bragelonne's return, and thinking over the advantages which might be drawn from this return, she had feigned indisposition in order to remain behind. Madame was therefore confident of finding La Vallière's room and Saint-Aignan's apartment perfectly empty. She took a pass-key from her pocket and opened the door of her maid of honor's apartment. Bragelonne's gaze was immediately fixed upon the interior of the room, which he recognized at once; and the impression which the sight of it produced upon him was torture. The princess looked at him, and her practiced eye at once detected what was passing in the young man's heart.

"You asked for proofs," she said, "do not be astonished then, if I give you them. But if you do not think you have courage enough to confront them, there is still time to withdraw."

"I thank you, madame," said Bragelonne; "but I came

here to be convinced. You promised to convince me,—do so."

"Enter, then," said Madame, "and shut the door behind you."

Bragelonne obeyed, and then turned towards the princess, whom he interrogated by a look.

"You know where you are, I suppose?" inquired Madame Henrietta.

"Everything leads me to believe I am in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's room."

"You are."

"But I would observe to your highness, that this room is a room, and is not a proof."

"Wait," said the princess, as she walked to the foot of the bed, folded up the screen into its several compartments, and stooped down towards the floor. "Look here," she continued; "stoop down and lift up this trap-door yourself!"

"A trap-door!" said Raoul astonished; for D'Artagnan's words began to return to his memory, and he had an indistinct recollection that D'Artagnan had made use of the same word. He looked, but uselessly, for some cleft or crevice which might indicate an opening or a ring to assist in lifting up the planking.

"Ah, I forgot," said Madame Henrietta, "I forgot the secret spring; the fourth plank of the flooring,—press on the spot where you will observe a knot in the wood. Those are the instructions; press, vicomte! press, I say, yourself."

Raoul, pale as death, pressed his finger on the spot which had been indicated to him; at the same moment the spring began to work, and the trap rose of its own accord.

"It is ingenious enough, certainly," said the princess; "and one can see that the architect foresaw that a woman's

hand only would have to make use of this spring, for see how easily the trap-door opened without assistance."

"A staircase!" cried Raoul.

"Yes, and a very pretty one, too," said Madame Henrietta. "See, vicomte, the staircase has a balustrade, intended to prevent the falling of timid persons, who might be tempted to descend the staircase; and I will risk myself on it accordingly. Come, vicomte, follow me!"

"But before following you, madame, may I ask where this staircase leads to?"

"Ah, true; I forgot to tell you. You know, perhaps, that formerly, M. de Saint-Aignan lived in the very next apartment to the king?"

"Yes, madame I am aware of that; that was the arrangement, at least, before I left; and more than once I had the honor of visiting his rooms."

"Well; he obtained the king's leave to change his former convenient and beautiful apartment for the two rooms to which this staircase will conduct us, and which together form a lodging for him, half the size, and at ten times greater distance from the king,—a close proximity to whom is by no means disdained, in general, by the gentlemen belonging to the court."

"Very good, madame," returned Raoul; "but go on, I beg, for I do not understand yet."

"Well, then it accidentally happened," continued the princess, "that M. de Saint-Aignan's apartment is situated underneath the apartments of my maids of honor, and by a further coincidence, exactly underneath the room of La Vallière."

"But what was the motive of this trap-door and this staircase?"

"That I cannot tell you. Would you like to go down to Monsieur de Saint-Aignan's rooms? Perhaps we shall be able to find the solution of the enigma there."

And Madame set the example by going down herself, while Raoul, sighing deeply, followed her. At every step Bragelonne took, he advanced further into that mysterious apartment which had witnessed La Vallière's sighs, and still retained the perfume of her presence. Bragelonne fancied he perceived, as he inhaled the atmosphere, that the young girl must have passed through. Then succeeded to these emanations of herself, which he regarded as invisible though certain proofs, flowers she preferred to all others—books of her own selection. If Raoul retained a single doubt on the subject, it would have vanished at the secret harmony of tastes, and connection of the mind with the ordinary objects of life. La Vallière, in Bragelonne's eyes, was present there in each article of furniture, in the color of the hangings, in all that surrounded him. Dumb, and completely overwhelmed, there was nothing further for him now to learn, and he followed his pitiless conductress as blindly as the culprit follows the executioner; while Madame, as cruel as women of overstrung temperaments generally are, did not spare him the slightest detail. But it must be admitted, that, notwithstanding the kind of apathy into which he had fallen, none of these details, even had he been left alone, would have escaped him. The happiness of the woman who loves, when that happiness is derived from a rival, is a living torture for a jealous man; but for a jealous man such as Raoul was, for one whose heart for the first time in its existence was being steeped in gall and bitterness, Louise's happiness was in reality an ignominious death, a death of body and soul. He guessed all; he fancied he could see them, with their hands clasped in each other's, their faces drawn close together, and reflected, side by side, in loving proximity, as they gazed upon the mirrors around them—so sweet an occupation for lovers, who, as they thus see themselves twice

over, imprint the picture still more deeply on their memories. He could guess, too, the stolen kiss snatched as they separated from each other's loved society. The luxury, the studied elegance, eloquent of the perfection of indolence, of ease; the extreme care shown, either to spare the loved object every annoyance, or to occasion her a delightful surprise; that might and majesty of love multiplied by the majesty and might of royalty itself, seemed like a death-blow to Raoul. If there be anything which can in any way assuage or mitigate the tortures of jealousy, it is the inferiority of the man who is preferred to yourself; whilst, on the very contrary, if there be one anguish more bitter than another, a misery for which language lacks a word, it is the superiority of the man preferred to yourself, superior, perhaps, in youth, beauty, grace. It is in such moments as these that Heaven almost seems to have taken part against the disdained and rejected lover.

One final pang was reserved for poor Raoul. Madame Henrietta lifted up a silk curtain, and behind the canvas he perceived La Vallière's portrait. Not only the portrait of La Vallière, but of La Vallière radiant with youth, beauty, and happiness, inhaling life and enjoyment at every pore, because at eighteen years of age love itself is life.

"Louise!" murmured Bragelonne,—"Louise! is it true, then? Oh, you have never loved me, for never have you looked at me in that manner." And he felt as if his heart were crushed within his bosom.

Madame Henrietta looked at him, almost envious of his extreme grief, although she well knew there was nothing to envy in it, and that she herself was as passionately loved by De Guiche as Louise by Bragelonne. Raoul interpreted Madame Henrietta's look.

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me, madame; in your pres-

ence I know I ought to have greater self-control. But Heaven grant that you may never be struck by similar misery to that which crushes me at this moment, for you are but a woman, and would not be able to endure so terrible an affliction. Forgive me, I again entreat you, madame; I am but a man without rank or position, while you belong to a race whose happiness knows no bounds, whose power acknowledges no limit."

"Monsieur de Bragelonne," replied Henrietta, "a mind such as yours merits all the consideration and respect which a queen's heart even can bestow. Regard me as your friend, monsieur; and as such, indeed, I would not allow your whole life to be poisoned by perfidy, and covered with ridicule. It was I, indeed, who, with more courage than any of your pretended friends,—I except M. de Guiche,—was the cause of your return from London; it is I, also, who now give you the melancholy proofs, necessary, however, for your cure if you are a lover with courage in his heart, and not a weeping Amadis. Do not thank me; pity me even, and do not serve the king less faithfully than you have done."

Raoul smiled bitterly. "Ah! true, true; I was forgetting that; the king is my master."

"Your liberty, nay, your very life, is in danger."

A steady, penetrating look informed Madame Henrietta that she was mistaken, and that her last argument was not a likely one to affect the young man. "Take care, Monsieur de Bragelonne," she said, "for if you do not weigh well all your actions, you might throw into an extravagance of wrath, a prince, whose passions once aroused, exceed the bounds of reason, and you would thereby involve your friends and family in the deepest distress; you must bend, you must submit, and you must cure yourself."

"I thank you, madame; I appreciate the advice your

royal highness is good enough to give me, and I will endeavor to follow it; but one final word, I beg."

"Name it."

"Should I be indiscreet in asking you the secret of this staircase, of this trap-door; a secret which, it seems, you have discovered?"

"Nothing more simple. For the purpose of exercising a surveillance over the young girls who are attached to my service, I have duplicate keys of their doors. It seemed very strange to me, that M. de Saint-Aignan should change his apartments. It seemed very strange, that the king should come to see M. de Saint-Aignan every day, and, finally, it seemed very strange, that so many things should be done during your absence, that the very habits and customs of the court appeared changed. I do not wish to be trifled with by the king, nor to serve as a cloak for his love affairs; for after La Vallière, who weeps incessantly, he will take a fancy to Montalais, who is always laughing; and then to Tonnay-Charente, who does nothing but sing all day; to act such a part as that would be unworthy of me. I thrust aside the scruples which my friendship for you suggested. I discovered the secret. I have wounded your feelings I know; and I again entreat you to pardon me; but I had a duty to fulfil. I have discharged it. You are now forewarned; the tempest will soon burst; protect yourself accordingly."

"You naturally expect, however, that a result of some kind must follow," replied Bragelonne, with firmness; "for you do not suppose I shall silently accept the shame thus thrust upon me, or the treachery which has been practiced against me?"

"You will take whatever steps in the matter you please, Monsieur Raoul, only do not betray the source whence you derived the truth. That is all I have to ask,

—the only price I require for the service I have rendered you."

"Fear nothing, madame," said Bragelonne, with a bitter smile.

"I bribed the locksmith, in whom the lovers confided. You can just as well have done so as myself, can you not?"

"Yes, madame. Your royal highness, however, has no other advice or caution to give me, except that of not betraying you."

"None."

"I am about, therefore, to beg your royal highness to allow me to remain here for one moment."

"Without me?"

"Oh! no, madame. It matters very little; for what I have to do can be done in your presence. I only ask one moment to write a line to some one."

"It is dangerous, Monsieur de Bragelonne. Take care."

"No one can possibly know that your royal highness has done me the honor to conduct me here. Besides, I shall sign the letter I am going to write."

"Do as you please, then."

Raoul drew out his tablet, and wrote rapidly on one of the leaves the following words:—

"Monsieur le Comte,—Do not be surprised to find this paper signed by me; the friend I shall very shortly send to call on you will have the honor to explain the object of my visit.

"Vicomte Raoul de Bragelonne."

He rolled up the paper, slipped it into the lock of the door which communicated with the room set apart for the two lovers, and satisfied himself that the missive was so apparent that Saint-Aignan could not but see it as he

entered; he rejoined the princess, who had already reached the top of the staircase. They then separated. Raoul pretending to thank her highness; Henrietta pitying, or seeming to pity, with all her heart, the wretched young man she had just condemned to such fearful torture. "Oh!" she said, as she saw him disappear, pale as death, and his eyes bursting with blood, "if I had foreseen this, I would have hid the truth from that poor gentleman."

CHAPTER XXXII.

PORTHOS'S PLAN OF ACTION.

The great number of individuals we have introduced into this long story is the reason why each of them has been forced to appear only in turn, according to the exigencies of the recital. The result is, that our readers have had no opportunity of meeting our friend Porthos since his return from Fontainebleau. The honors which he had received from the king had not changed the easy, affectionate character of that excellent-hearted man; he may, perhaps, have held up his head a little higher than usual, and a majesty of demeanor, as it were, may have betrayed itself since the honor of dining at the king's table had been accorded him. His majesty's banqueting-room had produced a certain effect upon Porthos. Le Seigneur de Bracieux et de Pierrefonds delighted to remember that, during that memorable dinner, the numerous array of servants, and the large number of officials in attendance on the guests, gave a certain tone and effect to the repast, and seemed, as it were, to furnish the room. Porthos undertook to confer upon Mouston a position of some kind or other, in order to establish a sort of hierarchy

among his other domestics, and to create a military household, which was not unusual among the great captains of the age, since, in the preceding century, this luxury had been greatly encouraged by Messieurs de Tréville, de Schomberg, de la Vieuville, without alluding to M. de Richelieu, M. de Condé, and de Bouillon-Turenne. And, therefore, why should not he, Porthos, the friend of the king, and of M. Fouquet, a baron, an engineer, etc., why should not he, indeed, enjoy all the delightful privileges which large possessions and unusual merit invariably confer? Somewhat neglected by Aramis, who, we know, was greatly occupied with M. Fouquet; neglected, also, on account of his being on duty, by D'Artagnan; tired of Truchet and Planchet, Porthos was surprised to find himself dreaming, without precisely knowing why; but if any one had said to him, "Do you want anything, Porthos?" he would, most certainly, have replied, "Yes." After one of those dinners, during which Porthos attempted to recall to his recollection all the details of the royal banquet, gently joyful, thanks to the excellence of the wines; gently melancholy, thanks to his ambitious ideas, Porthos was gradually falling off into a placid doze, when his servant entered to announce that M. de Bragelonne wished to speak to him. Porthos passed into an adjoining room, where he found his young friend in the disposition of mind we are already aware of. Raoul advanced towards Porthos, and shook him by the hand; Porthos, surprised at his seriousness of aspect, offered him a seat. "Dear M. du Vallon," said Raoul, "I have a service to ask of you."

"Nothing could happen more fortunately, my young friend," replied Porthos; "I have eight thousand livres sent me this morning from Pierrefonds; and if you want any money——"

"No, I thank you; it is not money."

"So much the worse, then. I have always heard it

said that that is the rarest service, but the easiest to render. The remark struck me; I like to cite remarks that strike me."

"Your heart is as good as your mind is sound and true."

"You are much too kind, I declare. You will dine here, of course?"

"No; I am not hungry."

"Eh! not dine? What a dreadful country England is!"

"Not too much so, indeed—but——"

"Well, if such excellent fish and meat were not to be procured there, it would hardly be endurable."

"Yes, I came to——"

"I am listening. Only just allow me to take a little sip. One gets thirsty in Paris;" and he ordered a bottle of champagne to be brought; and, having first filled Raoul's glass, he filled his own, drank it down at a gulp, and then resumed:—"I needed that, in order to listen to you with proper attention. I am now entirely at your service. What do you wish to ask me, dear Raoul? What do you want?"

"Give me your opinion on quarrels in general, my dear friend."

"My opinion! Well—but——. Explain your idea a little more coherently," replied Porthos, rubbing his forehead.

"I mean—you are generally good-humored, good-tempered, whenever any misunderstanding arises between a friend of yours and a stranger, for instance?"

"Oh! in the best of tempers."

"Very good; but what do you do, in such a case?"

"Whenever any friend of mine gets into a quarrel, I always act on one principle."

"What is that?"

"That lost time is irreparable, and one never arranges an affair so well as when everything has been done to embroil the disputants as much as possible."

"Ah! indeed, is that the principle on which you proceed."

"Precisely; so, as soon as a quarrel takes place, I bring the two parties together."

"Exactly."

"You understand that by this means it is impossible for an affair not to be arranged."

"I should have thought that, treated in this manner, an affair would, on the contrary——"

"Oh! not the least in the world. Just fancy, now, I have had in my life something like a hundred and eighty to a hundred and ninety regular duels, without reckoning hasty encounters, or chance meetings."

"It is a very handsome aggregate," said Raoul, unable to resist a smile.

"A mere nothing; but I am so gentle. D'Artagnan reckons his duels by hundreds. It is very true he is a little too hard and sharp—I have often told him so."

"And so," resumed Raoul, "you generally arrange the affairs of honor your friends confide to you."

"There is not a single instance in which I have not finished by arranging every one of them," said Porthos, with a gentleness and confidence that surprised Raoul.

"But the way in which you settle them is at least honorable, I suppose?"

"Oh! rely upon that; and at this stage, I will explain my other principle to you. As soon as my friend has entrusted his quarrel to me, this is what I do: I go to his adversary at once, armed with a politeness and self-possession absolutely requisite under such circumstances."

"That is the way, then," said Raoul, bitterly, "that you arrange affairs so safely."

"I believe you. I go to the adversary, then, and say to him: 'It is impossible, monsieur, that you are ignorant of the extent to which you have insulted my friend.'" Raoul frowned at this remark.

"It sometimes happens—very often, indeed," pursued Porthos—"that my friend has not been insulted at all; he has even been the first to give offence; you can imagine, therefore, whether my language is or is not well chosen." And Porthos burst into a peal of laughter.

"Decidedly," said Raoul to himself while the merry thunder of Porthos's laughter was resounding in his ears, "I am very unfortunate. De Guiche treats me with coolness, D'Artagnan with ridicule, Porthos is too tame; no one will settle this affair in the only way I wish it to be settled. And I came to Porthos because I wanted to find a sword instead of cold reasoning at my service. My ill-luck dogs me."

Porthos who had recovered himself, continued: "By one simple expression, I leave my adversary without an excuse."

"That is as it may happen," said Raoul, absently.

"Not at all, it is quite certain. I have not left him an excuse; and then it is that I display all my courtesy, in order to attain the happy issue of my project. I advance, therefore, with an air of great politeness, and taking my adversary by the hand, I say to him: 'Now that you are convinced of having given the offence, we are sure of reparation; between my friend and yourself, the future can only offer an exchange of mutual courtesies of conduct, and consequently, my mission now is to acquaint you with the length of my friend's sword.'"

"What!" said Raoul.

"Wait a minute. 'The length of my friend's sword. My horse is waiting below; my friend is in such and such a spot, and is impatiently awaiting your agreeable society;

I will take you with me; we can call upon your second as we go along:' and the affair is arranged."

"And so," said Raoul, pale with vexation, "you reconcile the two adversaries on the ground."

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Porthos. "Reconcile! What for?"

"You said that the affair was arranged."

"Of course! since my friend is waiting for him."

"Well! what then? If he is waiting ——"

"Well! if he is waiting, it is merely to stretch his legs a little. The adversary, on the contrary, is stiff from riding; they place themselves in proper order, and my friend kills his opponent, and the affair is ended."

"Ah! he kills him, then?" cried Raoul.

"I should think so," said Porthos. "Is it likely I should ever have as a friend a man who allows himself to get killed? I have a hundred and one friends; at the head of the list stand your father, Aramis, and D'Artagnan, all of whom are living and well, I believe."

"Oh, my dear baron," exclaimed Raoul, as he embraced Porthos.

"You approve of my method, then?" said the giant.

"I approve of it so thoroughly, that I shall have recourse to it this very day, without a moment's delay,—at once in fact. You are the very man I have been looking for."

"Good; here I am, then; you want to fight, I suppose?"

"Absolutely."

"It is very natural. With whom?"

"With M. de Saint-Aignan."

"I know him—a most agreeable man, who was exceedingly polite to me the day I had the honor of dining with the king. I shall certainly acknowledge his politeness in return, even if it had not happened to be my usual custom. So, he has given you offence?"

"A mortal offence."

"The deuce! I can say so, I suppose?"

"More than that, even, if you like."

"That is a very great convenience."

"I may look upon it as one of your arranged affairs, may I not?" said Raoul, smiling.

"As a matter of course. Where will you be waiting for him?"

"Ah! I forgot; it is a very delicate matter. M. de Saint-Aignan is a very great friend of the king's."

"So I have heard it said."

"So that if I kill him——"

"Oh! you will kill him, certainly; you must take every precaution to do so. But there is no difficulty in these matters now; if you had lived in our early days,—ah, those were days worth living for!"

"My dear friend, you do not quite understand me. I mean, that M. de Saint-Aignan being a friend of the king, the affair will be more difficult to manage, since the king might learn beforehand——"

"Oh! no; that is not likely. You know my method: 'Monsieur, you have injured my friend, and——'"

"Yes, I know it."

"And then: 'Monsieur, I have horses below,' I carry him off before he can have spoken to any one."

"Will he allow himself to be carried off like that?"

"I should think so! I should like to see it fail. It would be the first time, if it did. It is true, though, that the young men of the present day—— Bah! I would carry him off bodily, if that were all," and Porthos, adding gesture to speech, lifted Raoul and the chair he was sitting on off the ground, and carried them round the room.

"Very good," said Raoul, laughing. "All we have to do is to state the grounds of the quarrel to M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Well, but that is done, it seems."

"No, my dear M. du Vallon, the usage of the present day requires that the cause of the quarrel should be explained."

"Very good. Tell me what it is, then."

"The fact is——"

"Deuce take it! how troublesome all this is! In former days we had no occasion to say anything about the matter. People fought then for the sake of fighting; and I, for one, know no better reason than that."

"You are quite right, M. du Vallon."

"However, tell me what the cause is."

"It is too long a story to tell; only as one must particularize to a certain extent, and as, on the other hand, the affair is full of difficulties, and requires the most absolute secrecy, you will have the kindness merely to tell M. de Saint-Aignan that he has, in the first place, insulted me by changing his lodgings."

"By changing his lodgings? Good," said Porthos, who began to count on his fingers; "next?"

"Then in getting a trap-door made in his new apartments."

"I understand," said Porthos; "a trap-door, upon my word this is very serious; you ought to be furious at that. What the deuce does the fellow mean by getting trap-doors made without first consulting you? Trap-doors! *mordioux!* I haven't got any, except in my dungeons at Bracieux."

"And you will please add," said Raoul, "that my last motive for considering myself insulted is, the existence of the portrait that M. de Saint-Aignan well knows."

"Is it possible? A portrait, too! A change of residence, a trap-door, and a portrait! Why, my dear friend, with but one of those causes of complaint there is enough, and more than enough, for all the gentlemen in France and

Spain to cut each other's throats, and that is saying but very little."

"Well, my dear friend, you are furnished with all you need, I suppose?"

"I shall take a second horse with me. Select your own rendezvous, and while you are waiting there, you can practise some of the best passes, so as to get your limbs as elastic as possible."

"Thank you. I shall be waiting for you in the wood of Vincennes, close to Minimes."

"All goes well, then. Where am I to find this M. de Saint-Aignan?"

"At the Palais-Royal."

Porthos rang a huge hand-bell. "My court suit," he said to the servant who answered the summons, "my horse, and a led horse to accompany me." Then turning to Raoul, as soon as the servant had quitted the room, he said. "Does your father know anything about this?"

"No; I am going to write to him."

"And D'Artagnan?"

"No, nor D'Artagnan either. He is very cautious, you know, and might have diverted me from my purpose."

"D'Artagnan is a sound adviser, though," said Porthos, astonished that, in his own loyal faith in D'Artagnan, any one could have thought of himself, so long as there was a D'Artagnan in the world.

"Dear M. du Vallon," said Raoul, "do not question me any more, I implore you. I have told you all that I had to say; it is prompt action I now expect, sharp and decided as you know how to arrange it. That, indeed, is my reason for having chosen you."

"You will be satisfied with me," replied Porthos.

"Do not forget, either, that, except ourselves, no one must know anything of this meeting."

"People generally find these things out," said Porthos,

dryly, "when a dead body is discovered in a wood. But I promise everything, my dear friend, except the concealment of the dead body. There it is, and it must be seen, as a matter of course. It is a principle of mine, not to bury bodies. That has a smack of the assassin about it. Every risk has its peculiarities."

"To work, then, my dear friend."

"Rely upon me," said the giant, finishing the bottle, while a servant spread out upon a sofa the gorgeously decorated dress trimmed with lace.

Raoul left the room, saying to himself, with a secret delight, "Perfidious king! traitorous monarch! I cannot reach thee. I do not wish it; for kings are sacred objects. But your friend, your accomplice, your panderer—the coward who represents you—shall pay for your crime. I will kill him in thy name, and, afterwards, we will bethink ourselves of—*Louise*"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CHANGE OF RESIDENCE, THE TRAP-DOOR, AND THE PORTRAIT.

Porthos, intrusted, to his great delight, with this mission, which made him feel young again, took half an hour less than his usual time to put on his court suit. To show that he was a man acquainted with the usages of high society, he had begun by sending his lackey to inquire if Monsieur de Saint-Aignan were at home, and heard, in answer, that M. le Comte de Saint-Aignan had had the honor of accompanying the king to Saint-Germain, as well as the whole court; but that monsieur le comte had

just that moment returned. Immediately upon this reply, Porthos made as much haste as possible, and reached Saint-Aignan's apartments just as the latter was having his boots taken off. The promenade had been delightful. The king, who was in love more than ever, and of course happier than ever, behaved in the most charming manner to every one. Nothing could possibly equal his kindness. M. de Saint-Aignan, it may be remembered, was a poet, and fancied that he had proved that he was so, under too many a memorable circumstance, to allow the title to be disputed by any one. An indefatigable rhymester, he had, during the whole of the journey, overwhelmed with quatrains, sextains, and madrigals, first the king, and then La Vallière. The king, on his side, was in a similarly poetical mood, and had made a distich; while La Vallière, delighting in poetry, as most women do who are in love, had composed two sonnets. The day, then, had not been a bad one for Apollo; and so, as soon as he had returned to Paris, Saint-Aignan, who knew beforehand that his verses would be sure to be extensively circulated in court circles, occupied himself, with a little more attention than he had been able to bestow during the promenade, with the composition, as well as with the idea itself. Consequently, with all the tenderness of a father about to start his children in life, he candidly interrogated himself whether the public would find these offsprings of his imagination sufficiently elegant and graceful; and in order to make his mind easy on the subject, M. de Saint-Aignan recited to himself the madrigal he had composed, and which he had repeated from memory to the king, and had promised to write out for him on his return. All the time he was committing these words to memory, the comte was engaged in undressing himself more completely. He had just taken off his coat, and was putting on his dressing-gown, when he was in-

formed that Monsieur le Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds was waiting to be received.

"Eh!" he said, "what does that bunch of names mean? I don't know anything about him."

"It is the same gentleman," replied the lackey, "who had the honor of dining with you, monseigneur, at the king's table, when his majesty was staying at Fontainebleau."

"Introduce him, then, at once," cried Saint-Aignan.

Porthos, in a few minutes, entered the room. M. de Saint-Aignan had an excellent recollection of persons, and, at the first glance, he recognized the gentleman from the country, who enjoyed so singular a reputation, and whom the king had received so favorably at Fontainebleau, in spite of the smiles of some of those who were present. He therefore advanced towards Porthos with all the outward signs of a consideration of manner which Porthos thought but natural, considering that he himself, whenever he called upon an adversary, hoisted a standard of the most refined politeness. Saint-Aignan desired the servant to give Porthos a chair; and the latter, who saw nothing unusual in this act of politeness, sat down gravely and coughed. The ordinary courtesies having been exchanged between the two gentlemen, the comte, to whom the visit was paid, said, "May I ask, monsieur le baron, to what happy circumstances I am indebted for the favor of a visit from you?"

"The very thing I am about to have the honor of explaining to you, monsieur le comte; but, I beg your pardon——"

"What is the matter, monsieur?" inquired Saint-Aignan.

"I regret to say that I have broken your chair."

"Not at all, monsieur," said Saint-Aignan; "not at all."

"It is the fact, though, monsieur le comte; I have broken it—so much so, indeed, that if I do not move, I shall fall

down, which would be an exceedingly disagreeable position for me in the discharge of the very serious mission which has been intrusted to me with regard to yourself."

Porthos rose; and but just in time, for the chair had given way several inches. Saint-Aignan looked about him for something more solid for his guest to sit upon.

"Modern articles of furniture," said Porthos, while the comte was looking about, "are constructed in a ridiculously flimsy manner. In my early days, when I used to sit down with far more energy than is now the case, I do not remember ever to have broken a chair, except in taverns, with my arms."

Saint-Aignan smiled at this remark. "But," said Porthos, as he settled himself down on a couch, which creaked, but did not give way beneath his weight, "that unfortunately has nothing whatever to do with my present visit."

"Why unfortunately? Are you the bearer of a message of ill-omen, monsieur le baron?"

"Of ill-omen—for a gentleman? Certainly not, monsieur le comte," replied Porthos, nobly. "I have simply come to say that you have seriously insulted a friend of mine."

"I, monsieur?" exclaimed Saint-Aignan—"I have insulted a friend of yours, do you say? May I ask his name?"

"M. Raoul de Bragelonne."

"I have insulted M. Raoul de Bragelonne!" cried Saint-Aignan. "I really assure you, monsieur, that it is quite impossible; for M. de Bragelonne, whom I knew but very slightly—nay, whom I know hardly at all—is in England, and, as I have not seen him for a long time past, I cannot possibly have insulted him."

"M. de Bragelonne is in Paris, monsieur le comte," said Porthos, perfectly unmoved; "and I repeat, it is quite certain you have insulted him, since he himself told me

you had. Yes, monsieur, you have seriously insulted him, mortally insulted him, I repeat."

"It is impossible, monsieur le baron, I swear, quite impossible."

"Besides," added Porthos, "you cannot be ignorant of the circumstance, since M. de Bragelonne informed me that he had already apprised you of it by a note."

"I give you my word of honor, monsieur, that I have received no note whatever."

"This is most extraordinary," replied Porthos.

"I will convince you," said Saint-Aignan, "that I have received nothing in any way from him." And he rang the bell. "Basque," he said to the servant who entered, "how many letters or notes were sent here during my absence?"

"Three, monsieur le comte—a note from M. de Fiesque, one from Madame de Laferté, and a letter from M. de las Fuentès."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, monsieur le comte."

"Speak the truth before this gentleman—the truth, you understand. I will take care you are not blamed."

"There was a note, also, from—from——"

"Well, from whom?"

"From Mademoiselle—de——"

"Out with it!"

"De Laval."

"That is quite sufficient," interrupted Porthos. "I believe you, monsieur le comte."

Saint-Aignan dismissed the valet, and followed him to the door, in order to close it after him; and when he had done so, looking straight before him, he happened to see in the keyhole of the adjoining apartment the paper which Bragelonne had slipped in there as he left. "What is this?" he said.

Porthos, who was sitting with his back to the room turned round. "Aha!" he said.

"A note in the keyhole!" exclaimed Saint-Aignan.

"That is not unlikely to be the missing letter, monsieur le comte," said Porthos.

Saint-Aignan took out the paper. "A note from M. de Bragelonne!" he exclaimed.

"You see, monsieur, I was right. Oh, when I say a thing——"

"Brought here by M. de Bragelonne himself," the comte murmured, turning pale. "This is infamous! How could he possibly have come here?" And the comte rang again.

"Who has been here during my absence with the king?"

"No one, monsieur."

"That is impossible! Some one must have been here."

"No one could possibly have entered, monsieur; since the keys have never left my pocket."

"And yet I find this letter in yonder lock; some one must have put it there; it could not have come here of its own accord."

Basque opened his arms as if signifying the most absolute ignorance on the subject.

"Probably it was M. de Bragelonne himself who placed it there," said Porthos.

"In that case he must have entered here."

"How could that have been, since I have the key in my own pocket?" returned Basque, perseveringly.

Saint-Aignan crumpled the letter in his palm, after having read it. "There is something mysterious about this," he murmured, absorbed in thought.

"Shall we return to our little affair?" Porthos resumed, addressing Saint-Aignan after a brief pause.

"I think I can now understand it, from this note, which has arrived here in so singular a manner. Monsieur de Bragelonne says that a friend will call."

"I am his friend. I am the person he alludes to."

"For the purpose of giving me a challenge?"

"Precisely."

"And he complains that I have insulted him?"

"Mortally."

"In what way, may I ask; for his conduct is so mysterious, that, at least, it needs some explanation?"

"Monsieur," replied Porthos, "my friend cannot but be right; and, as far as his conduct is concerned, if it be mysterious, as you say, you have only yourself to blame for it." Porthos pronounced these words with an amount of confidence which, for a man who was unaccustomed to his ways, must have revealed an infinity of sense.

"Mystery, be it so; but what is all the mystery about?" said Saint-Aignan.

"You will think it best, perhaps," Porthos replied, with a low bow, "if I do not enter into particulars."

"Oh, I perfectly understand. We will touch very lightly upon it, then, so speak, monsieur, I am listening."

"In the first place, monsieur," said Porthos, "you have changed your apartments."

"Yes, that is quite true," said Saint-Aignan.

"You admit it," said Porthos, with an air of satisfaction.

"Admit it! of course I admit it. Why should I not admit it, do you suppose?"

"You have admitted it. Very good," said Porthos, lifting up one finger.

"But how can my having moved my lodgings have done M. de Bragelonne any harm? Have the goodness to tell me that, for I positively do not comprehend a word of what you are saying."

Porthos stopped him, and then said, with great gravity, "Monsieur, this is the first of M. de Bragelonne's com-

plaints against you. If he makes a complaint, it is because he feels himself insulted."

Saint-Aignan began to beat his foot impatiently on the ground. "This looks like a spurious quarrel," he said.

"No one can possibly have a spurious quarrel with the Vicomte de Bragelonne," returned Porthos; "but, at all events, you have nothing to add on the subject of your changing your apartments, I suppose?"

"Nothing. And what is the next point?"

"Ah, the next! You will observe, monsieur, that the one I have already mentioned is a most serious injury, to which you have given no answer, or rather, have answered very indifferently. Is it possible, monsieur, that you have changed your lodgings? M. de Bragelonne feels insulted at your having done so, and you do not attempt to excuse yourself."

"What!" cried Saint-Aignan, who was getting annoyed at the perfect coolness of his visitor—"what! am I to consult M. de Bragelonne whether I am to move or not? You can hardly be serious, monsieur."

"I am. And it is absolutely necessary, monsieur; but under any circumstances, you will admit that it is nothing in comparison with the second ground of complaint."

"Well, what is that?"

Porthos assumed a very solemn expression as he said: "How about the trap-door, monsieur?"

Saint-Aignan turned exceedingly pale. He pushed back his chair so abruptly, that Porthos, simple as he was, perceived that the blow had told. "The trap-door," murmured Saint-Aignan.

"Yes, monsieur, explain that if you can," said Porthos, shaking his head.

Saint-Aignan held down his head as he murmured: "I have been betrayed, everything is known!"

"Everything," replied Porthos, who knew nothing.

"You see me perfectly overwhelmed," pursued Saint-Aignan, "overwhelmed to a degree that I hardly know what I am about."

"A guilty conscience, monsieur. Your affair is a bad one, and when the public learns all about it, it will judge——"

"Oh, monsieur!" exclaimed the comte, hurriedly "such a secret ought not to be known even by one's confessor."

"That we will think about," said Porthos; "the secret will not go far, in fact."

"Surely, monsieur," returned Saint-Aignan, "since M. de Bragelonne has penetrated the secret, he must be aware of the danger he as well as others run the risk of incurring."

"M. de Bragelonne runs no danger, monsieur, nor does he fear any either, as you, if it please Heaven, will find out very soon."

"This fellow is a perfect madman," thought Saint-Aignan. "What, in Heaven's name, does he want?" He then said aloud: "Come, monsieur, let us hush up this affair."

"You forget the portrait," said Porthos, in a voice of thunder, which made the comte's blood freeze in his veins.

As the portrait in question was La Vallière's portrait, and as no mistake could any longer exist on the subject, Saint-Aignan's eyes were completely opened. "Ah!" he exclaimed—"ah! monsieur, I remember now that M. de Bragelonne was engaged to be married to her."

Porthos assumed an imposing air, all the majesty of ignorance, in fact, as he said: "It matters nothing whatever to me, nor to yourself, indeed, whether or not my friend was, as you say, engaged to be married. I am even astonished that you should have made use of so indiscreet a remark. It may possibly do your cause harm, monsieur."

"Monsieur," replied Saint-Aignan, "you are the incarnation of intelligence, delicacy, and loyalty of feeling united. I see the whole matter now clearly enough."

"So much the better," said Porthos.

"And," pursued Saint-Aignan, "you have made me comprehend it in the most ingenious and the most delicate manner possible. I beg you to accept my best thanks." Porthos drew himself up, unable to resist the flattery of the remark. "Only, now that I know everything, permit me to explain——"

Porthos shook his head as a man who does not wish to hear, but Saint-Aignan continued: "I am in despair, I assure you, at all that has happened; but how would you have acted in my place? Come, between ourselves, tell me what would you have done?"

Porthos drew himself up as he answered: "There is now no question at all of what I should have done, young man; you have been made acquainted with the three causes of complaint against you, I believe?"

"As for the first, my change of rooms, and I now address myself to you, as a man of honor and of great intelligence, could I, when the desire of so august a personage was so urgently expressed that I should move, ought I to have disobeyed?"

Porthos was about to speak, but Saint-Aignan did not give him time to answer. "Ah! my frankness, I see, convinces you," he said, interpreting the movement according to his own fancy. "You feel that I am right."

Porthos did not reply, and so Saint-Aignan continued: "I pass by that unfortunate trap-door," he said, placing his hand on Porthos's arm, "that trap-door, the occasion and the means of so much unhappiness, and which was constructed for—you know what. Well, then, in plain truth, do you suppose that it was I who, of my own accord, in such a place too, had that trap-door made?—Oh, no!—

you do not believe it; and here, again, you feel, you guess, you understand the influence of a will superior to my own. You can conceive the infatuation, the blind, irresistible passion which has been at work. But, thank Heaven! I am fortunate in speaking to a man who has so much sensitiveness of feeling; if it were not so, indeed, what an amount of misery and scandal would fall upon her, poor girl! and upon him—whom I will not name."

Porthos, confused and bewildered by the eloquence and gestures of Saint-Aignan, made a thousand efforts to stem this torrent of words, of which, by the by, he did not understand a single one; he remained upright and motionless on his seat, and that was all he could do. Saint-Aignan continued, and gave a new inflection to his voice, and an increasing vehemence to his gesture: "As for the portrait, for I readily believe the portrait is the principal cause of complaint, tell me candidly if you think me to blame?—Who was it who wished to have her portrait? Was it I?—Who is in love with her? Is it I?—Who wishes to gain her affection? Again, is it I?—Who took her likeness? I, do you think? No! a thousand times no! I know M. de Bragelonne must be in a state of despair; I know these misfortunes are most cruel. But I, too, am suffering as well; and yet there is no possibility of offering any resistance. Suppose we were to fight? we would be laughed at. If he obstinately persists in his course, he is lost. You will tell me, I know, that despair is ridiculous, but then you are a sensible man. You have understood me. I perceive by your serious, thoughtful, embarrassed air, even, that the importance of the situation we are placed in has not escaped you. Return, therefore, to M. de Bragelonne; thank him—as I have indeed reason to thank him,—for having chosen as an intermediary a man of your high merit. Believe me that I shall, on my side, preserve an eternal gratitude for the man who has

so ingeniously, so cleverly arranged the misunderstanding between us. And since ill luck would have it that the secret should be known to four instead of to three, why, this secret, which might make the most ambitious man's fortune, I am delighted to share with you, monsieur, from the bottom of my heart I am delighted at it. From this very moment you can make use of me as you please, I place myself entirely at your mercy. What can I possibly do for you? What can I solicit, nay, require even? You have only to speak, monsieur, only to speak."

And, according to the familiarly friendly fashion of that period, Saint-Aignan threw his arms round Porthos, and clasped him tenderly in his embrace. Porthos allowed him to do this with the most perfect indifference. "Speak," resumed Saint-Aignan, "what do you require?"

"Monsieur," said Porthos, "I have a horse below, be good enough to mount him, he is a very good one and will play you no tricks."

"Mount on horseback! what for?" inquired Saint-Aignan, with no little curiosity.

"To accompany me where M. de Bragelonne is awaiting us."

"Ah! he wishes to speak to me, I suppose? I can well believe that; he wishes to have the details, very likely; alas! it is a very delicate matter; but at the present moment I cannot, for the king is waiting for me."

"The king must wait then," said Porthos.

"What do you say? the king must wait!" interrupted the finished courtier, with a smile of utter amazement, for he could not understand that the king could under any circumstances be supposed to have to wait.

"It is merely the affair of a very short hour," returned Porthos.

"But where is M. de Bragelonne waiting for me?"

"At the Minimes, at Vincennes."

"Ah, indeed! but are we going to laugh over the affair when we get there?"

"I don't think it likely," said Porthos, as his face assumed a look of utter hardness.

"But the Minimes is a rendezvous where duels take place, and what can I have to do at the Minimes?"

Porthos slowly drew his sword, and said: "That is the length of my friend's sword."

"Why, the man is mad!" cried Saint-Aignan.

The color mounted to Porthos's face, as he replied: "If I had not the honor of being in your own apartment, monsieur, and of representing M. de Bragelonne's interests, I would throw you out of the window. It will be merely a pleasure postponed, and you will lose nothing by waiting. Will you come with me to the Minimes, monsieur, of your own free-will?"

"But——"

"Take care, I will carry you if you do not come quietly."

"Basque!" cried Saint-Aignan. As soon as Basque appeared, he said, "The king wishes to see monsieur le comte."

"That is very different," said Porthos; "the king's service before everything else. We will wait until this evening, monsieur."

And saluting Saint-Aignan with his usual courtesy, Porthos left the room, delighted at having arranged another affair. Saint-Aignan looked after him as he left; and then hastily putting on his court dress again, he ran off, arranging his costume as he went along, muttering to himself, "The Minimes! the Minimes! We shall see how the king will fancy this challenge; for it is for him after all, that is certain."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RIVALS IN POLITICS.

On his return from the promenade, which had been so prolific in poetical effusions, and in which every one had paid his or her tribute to the Muses, as the poets of the period used to say, the king found M. Fouquet waiting for an audience. M. Colbert had lain in wait for his majesty in the corridor, and followed him like a jealous and watchful shadow; M. Colbert, with his square head, his vulgar and untidy, though rich costume, somewhat resembled a Flemish gentleman after he had been over-indulging in his national drink—beer. Fouquet, at sight of his enemy, remained perfectly unmoved, and during the whole of the scene which followed scrupulously resolved to observe a line of conduct particularly difficult to the man of superior mind, who does not even wish to show his contempt, for fear of doing his adversary too much honor. Colbert made no attempt to conceal his insolent expression of the vulgar joy he felt. In his opinion, M. Fouquet's was a game very badly played and hopelessly lost, although not yet finished. Colbert belonged to that school of politicians who think cleverness alone worthy of their admiration, and success the only thing worth caring for. Colbert, moreover, who was not simply an envious and jealous man, but who had the king's interest really at heart because he was thoroughly imbued with the highest sense of probity in all matters of figures and accounts, could well afford to assign as a pretext for his conduct, that in hating and doing his utmost to ruin M. Fouquet,

he had nothing in view but the welfare of the state and the dignity of the crown. None of these details escaped Fouquet's observation; through his enemy's thick, bushy brows, and despite the restless movement of his eyelids, he could, by merely looking at his eyes, penetrate to the very bottom of Colbert's heart, and he read to what an unbounded extent hate towards himself and triumph at his approaching fall existed there. But, as, in observing everything, he wished to remain himself impenetrable, he composed his features, smiled with the charmingly sympathetic smile that was peculiarly his own, and saluted the king with the most dignified and graceful ease and elasticity of manner. "Sire," he said, "I perceive by your majesty's joyous air that you have been gratified with the promenade."

"Most gratified, indeed, monsieur le surintendant, most gratified. You were very wrong not to come with us, as I invited you to do."

"I was working, sire," replied the superintendent, who did not even seem to take the trouble to turn aside his head in merest recognition of Colbert's presence.

"Ah! M. Fouquet," cried the king, "there is nothing like the country. I should be delighted to live in the country always, in the open air and under the trees."

"I should hope that your majesty is not yet weary of the throne," said Fouquet.

"No; but thrones of soft turf are very pleasant."

"Your majesty gratifies my utmost wishes in speaking in that manner, for I have a request to submit to you."

"On whose behalf, monsieur?"

"On behalf of the nymphs of Vaux, sire."

"Ah! ah!" said Louis XIV.

"Your majesty, too, once deigned to make me a promise," said Fouquet.

"Yes, I remember it."

"The *fête* at Vaux, the celebrated *fête*, I think, it was, sire," said Colbert, endeavoring to show his importance by taking part in the conversation.

Fouquet, with the profoundest contempt, did not take the slightest notice of the remark, as if, as far as he was concerned, Colbert had not even thought or said a word.

"Your majesty is aware," he said, "that I destine my estate at Vaux to receive the most amiable of princes, the most powerful of monarchs."

"I have given you my promise, monsieur," said Louis XIV., smiling; "and a king never departs from his word."

"And I have come now, sire, to inform your majesty that I am ready to obey your orders in every respect."

"Do you promise me many wonders, monsieur le surintendant?" said Louis, looking at Colbert.

"Wonders? Oh! no, sire. I do not undertake that, I hope to be able to procure your majesty a little pleasure, perhaps even a little forgetfulness of the cares of state."

"Nay, nay, M. Fouquet," returned the king; "I insist upon the word 'wonders.' You are a magician, I believe; we all know the power you wield; we also know that you can find gold even when there is none to be found elsewhere; so much so, indeed, that the people say you coin it."

Fouquet felt that the shot was discharged from a double quiver, and that the king had launched an arrow from his own bow as well as one from Colbert's. "Oh!" said he, laughingly, "the people know perfectly well out of what mine I procure the gold; and they know it only too well, perhaps; besides," he added, "I can assure your majesty that the gold destined to pay the expenses of the *fête* at Vaux will cost neither blood nor tears; hard labor it may, perhaps, but that can be paid for."

Louis paused quite confused. He wished to look at Col-

bert; Colbert, too, wished to reply to him; a glance as swift as an eagle's, a king-like glance, indeed, which Fouquet darted at the latter, arrested the words upon his lips. The king, who had by this time recovered his self-possession, turned towards Fouquet, saying, "I presume, therefore, I am now to consider myself formally invited?"

"Yes, sire, if your majesty will condescend so far as to accept my invitation."

"What day have you fixed?"

"Any day your majesty may find most convenient."

"You speak like an enchanter who has but to conjure up in actuality the wildest fancies, Monsieur Fouquet. I could not say so much, indeed, myself."

"Your majesty will do, whenever you please, everything that a monarch can and ought to do. The king of France has servants at his bidding who are able to do anything on his behalf, to accomplish everything to gratify his pleasures."

Colbert tried to look at the superintendent, in order to see whether this remark was an approach to less hostile sentiments on his part; but Fouquet had not even looked at his enemy, and Colbert hardly seemed to exist as far as he was concerned. "Very good, then," said the king. "Will a week hence suit you?"

"Perfectly well, sire."

"This is Tuesday; if I give you until next Sunday week, will that be sufficient?"

"The delay which your majesty deigns to accord me will greatly aid the various works which my architects have in hand for the purpose of adding to the amusement of your majesty and your friends."

"By the by, speaking of my friends," resumed the king; "how do you intend to treat them?"

"The king is master everywhere, sire; your majesty will draw up your own list and give your own orders.

All those you may deign to invite will be my guests, my honored guests indeed."

"I thank you!" returned the king, touched by the noble thought expressed in so noble a tone.

Fouquet, therefore, took leave of Louis XIV., after a few words had been added with regard to the details of certain matters of business. He felt that Colbert would remain behind with the king, that they would both converse about him, and that neither of them would spare him in the least degree. The satisfaction of being able to give a last and terrible blow to his enemy seemed to him almost like a compensation for everything they were about to subject him to. He turned back again immediately, as soon indeed as he had reached the door, and addressing the king, said, "I was forgetting that I had to crave your majesty's forgiveness."

"In what respect?" said the king, graciously.

"For having committed a serious fault without perceiving it."

"A fault! You! Ah! Monsieur Fouquet, I shall be unable to do otherwise than forgive you. In what way or against whom have you been found wanting?"

"Against every sense of propriety, sire. I forgot to inform your majesty of a circumstance that has lately occurred of some little importance."

"What is it?"

Colbert trembled; he fancied that he was about to frame a denunciation against him. His conduct had been unmasked. A single syllable from Fouquet, a single proof formally advanced, and before the youthful loyalty of feeling which guided Louis XIV., Colbert's favor would disappear at once; the latter trembled, therefore, lest so daring a blow might overthrow his whole scaffold; in point of fact, the opportunity was so admirably suited to be taken advantage of, that a skillful, practiced player

like Aramis would not have let it slip. "Sire," said Fouquet, with an easy, unconcerned air, "since you have had the kindness to forgive me, I am perfectly indifferent about my confession; this morning I sold one of the official appointments I hold."

"One of your appointments," said the king, "which?"

Colbert turned perfectly livid. "That which conferred upon me, sire, a grand gown, and a stern air of gravity; the appointment of procureur-général."

The king involuntarily uttered a loud exclamation and looked at Colbert, who, with his face bedewed with perspiration, felt almost on the point of fainting. "To whom have you sold this department, Monsieur Fouquet?" inquired the king.

Colbert was obliged to lean against a column of the fireplace. "To a councilor belonging to the parliament, sire, whose name is Vanel."

"Vanel?"

"Yes, sire a particular friend of the intendant Colbert," added Fouquet; letting every word fall from his lips with the most inimitable nonchalance, and with an admirably assumed expression of forgetfulness and ignorance. And having finished, and having overwhelmed Colbert beneath the weight of this superiority, the superintendent again saluted the king and quitted the room, partially revenged by the stupefaction of the king and the humiliation of the favorite.

"Is it really possible," said the king, as soon as Fouquet had disappeared, "that he has sold that office?"

"Yes, sir," said Colbert, meaningly.

"He must be mad," the king added.

Colbert this time did not reply; he had penetrated the king's thought, a thought which amply revenged him for the humiliation he had just been made to suffer; his hatred was augmented by a feeling of bitter jealousy of

Fouquet; and a threat of disgrace was now added to the plan he had arranged for his ruin. Colbert felt perfectly assured that for the future, between Louis XIV. and himself, their hostile feelings and ideas would meet with no obstacles, and that at the first fault committed by Fouquet, which could be laid hold of as a pretext, the chastisement so long impending would be precipitated. Fouquet had thrown aside his weapons of defense, and hate and jealousy had picked them up. Colbert was invited by the king to the *fête* at Vaux; he bowed like a man confident in himself, and accepted the invitation with the air of one who almost confers a favor. The king was about writing down Saint-Aignan's name on his list of royal commands, when the usher announced the Comte de Saint-Aignan. As soon as the royal "Mercury" entered, Colbert discreetly withdrew.

CHAPTER XXXV.

RIVALS IN LOVE.

SAINT-AIGNAN had quitted Louis XIV. hardly a couple of hours before; but in the first effervescence of his affection, whenever Louis XIV. was out of sight of La Vallière, he was obliged to talk about her. Besides, the only person with whom he could speak about her at his ease was Saint-Aignan, and thus Saint-Aignan had become an indispensable.

"Ah, is that you, comte?" he exclaimed, as soon as he perceived him, doubly delighted, not only to see him again, but also to get rid of Colbert, whose scowling face always put him out of humor. "So much the better, I am very glad to see you. You will make one of the traveling party, I suppose?"

"Of what traveling party are you speaking, sire?" inquired Saint-Aignan.

"The one we are making up to go to the *fête* the superintendent is about to give at Vaux. Ah! Saint-Aignan, you will, at last, see a *fête*, a royal *fête*, by the side of which all our amusements at Fontainebleau are petty, contemptible affairs."

"At Vaux! the superintendent going to give a *fête* in your majesty's honor? Nothing more than that!"

"'Nothing more than that,' do you say? It is very diverting to find you treating it with so much disdain. Are you, who express such an indifference on the subject, aware, that as soon as it is known that M. Fouquet is going to receive me at Vaux next Sunday week, people will be striving their very utmost to get invited to the *fête*. I repeat, Saint-Aignan, you shall be one of the invited guests."

"Very well, sire; unless I shall, in the meantime, have undertaken a longer and a less agreeable journey."

"What journey do you allude to?"

"The one across the Styx, sire."

"Bah!" said Louis XIV., laughing.

"No, seriously, sire," replied Saint-Aignan, "I am invited; and in such a way, in truth, that I hardly know what to say, or how to act, in order to refuse the invitation."

"I do not understand you. I know that you are in a poetical vein; but try not to sink from Apollo to Phœbus."

"Very well; if your majesty will deign to listen to me, I will not keep your mind on the rack a moment longer."

"Speak."

"Your majesty knows the Baron du Vallon?"

"Yes, indeed; a good servant to my father, the late king, and an admirable companion at table; for, I think, you are referring to the gentleman who dined with us at Fontainebleau?"

"Yes, sire. Well, it was in the keyhole of that lock that I found yonder note."

"Who placed it there?"

"Either M. de Bragelonne, or the devil himself; but, inasmuch as the note smells of musk and not of sulphur, I conclude that it must be, not the devil, but M. de Bragelonne."

Louis bent his head, and seemed absorbed in sad and bitter thought. Perhaps something like remorse was at that moment passing through his heart. "The secret is discovered," he said.

"Sire, I shall do my utmost, that the secret dies in the breast of the man who possesses it!" said Saint-Aignan, in a tone of bravado, as he moved towards the door; but a gesture of the king made him pause.

"Where are you going?" he inquired.

"Where they await me, sire."

"What for?"

"To fight, in all probability."

"*You* fight!" exclaimed the king. "One moment, if you please, monsieur le comte!"

Saint-Aignan shook his head, as a rebellious child does, whenever any one interferes to prevent him throwing himself into a well, or playing with a knife. "But, sire," he said.

"In the first place," continued the king, "I want to be enlightened a little further."

"Upon all points, if your majesty will be pleased to interrogate me," replied Saint-Aignan, "I will throw what light I can."

"Who told you that M. de Bragelonne had penetrated into that room?"

"The letter which I found in the keyhole told me so."

"Who told you that it was De Bragelonne who put it there?"

"Who but himself would have dared to undertake such a mission?"

"You are right. How was he able to get into your rooms?"

"Ah! that is very serious, inasmuch as all the doors were closed, and my lackey, Basque, had the keys in his pocket."

"Your lackey must have been bribed."

"Impossible, sire; for if he had been bribed, those who did so would not have sacrificed the poor fellow, whom, it is not unlikely, they might want to turn to further use by and by, in showing so clearly that it was he whom they had made use of."

"Quite true. And now I can only form one conjecture."

"Tell me what it is, sire, and we shall see if it is the same that has presented itself to my mind."

"That he effected an entrance by means of the staircase."

"Alas, sire, that seems to me more than probable."

"There is no doubt that some one must have sold the secret of the trap-door."

"Either sold it or given it."

"Why do you make that distinction?"

"Because there are certain persons, sire, who, being above the price of a treason, give, and do not sell."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, sire! Your majesty's mind is too clear-sighted not to guess what I mean, and you will save me the embarrassment of naming the person I allude to"

"You are right: you mean Madame; I suppose her suspicions were aroused by your changing your lodgings."

"Madame has keys of the apartments of her maids of honor, and she is powerful enough to discover what no one but yourself could do, or she would not be able to discover anything."

"And you suppose, then, that my sister must have entered into an alliance with Bragelonne, and has informed him of all the details of the affair?"

"Possibly even better still, for she perhaps accompanied him there."

"Which way? through your own apartments?"

"You think it impossible, sire? Well, listen to me. Your majesty knows that Madame is very fond of perfumes?"

"Yes, she acquired that taste from my mother."

"Vervain particularly."

"Yes, it is the scent she prefers to all others."

"Very good, sire! my apartments happen to smell very strongly of vervain."

The king remained silent and thoughtful for a few moments, and then resumed: "But why should Madame take Bragelonne's part against me?"

Saint-Aignan could very easily have replied: "A woman's jealousy!" The king probed his friend to the bottom of his heart to ascertain if he had learned the secret of his flirtation with his sister-in-law. But Saint-Aignan was not an ordinary courtier; he did not lightly run the risk of finding out family secrets; and he was too good a friend of the Muses not to think very frequently of poor Ovidius Naso, whose eyes shed so many tears in expiation of his crime for having once beheld something, one hardly knows what, in the palace of Augustus. He therefore passed by Madame's secret very skillfully. But as he had shown no ordinary sagacity in indicating Madame's presence in his rooms in company with Bragelonne, it was necessary, of course, for him to repay with interest the king's *amour propre*, and reply plainly to the question which had been put to him of: "Why has Madame taken Bragelonne's part against me?"

"Why?" replied Saint-Aignan. "Your majesty for-

gets, I presume, that the Comte de Guiche is the intimate friend of the Vicomte de Bragelonne?"

"I do not see the connection, however," said the king.

"Ah! I beg your pardon then, sire; but I thought the Comte de Guiche was a very great friend of Madame's."

"Quite true," the king returned; "there is no occasion to search any further, the blow came from that direction."

"And is not your majesty of opinion that, in order to ward it off, it will be necessary to deal another blow?"

"Yes, but not one of the kind given in the Bois de Vincennes," replied the king.

"You forget, sire," said Saint-Aignan, "that I am a gentleman, and that I have been challenged."

"The challenge neither concerns nor was it intended for you."

"But I am the man, sire, who has been expected at the Minimes, sire, during the last hour and more; and I shall be dishonored if I do not go."

"The first honor and duty of a gentleman is obedience to his sovereign."

"Sire!"

"I order you to remain."

"Sire!"

"Obey, monsieur!"

"As your majesty pleases."

"Besides, I wish to have the whole of this affair explained; I wish to know how it is that I have been so insolently trifled with, as to have the sanctuary of my affections pried into. It is not you, Saint-Aignan, whose business it is to punish those who have acted in this manner, for it is not your honor they have attacked, but my own."

"I implore your majesty not to overwhelm M. de Bragelonne with your wrath, for although in the whole

of this affair he may have shown himself deficient in prudence, he has not been so in his feelings of loyalty."

"Enough! I shall know how to decide between the just and the unjust, even in the height of my anger. But take care that not a word of this is breathed to Madame."

"But what am I to do with regard to M. de Bragelonne? He will be seeking me in every direction, and——"

"I shall either have spoken to him, or taken care that he has been spoken to, before the evening is over."

"Let me once more entreat your majesty to be indulgent towards him."

"I have been indulgent long enough, comte," said Louis XIV., frowning severely; "it is now quite time to show certain persons that I am master in my own palace."

The king had hardly pronounced these words, which betokened that a fresh feeling of irritation was mingling with the recollections of old, when an usher appeared at the door of the cabinet. "What is the matter?" inquired the king, "and why do you presume to come when I have not summoned you?"

"Sire," said the usher, "your majesty desired me to permit M. le Comte de la Fère to pass freely on any and every occasion, when he might wish to speak to your majesty."

"Well, monsieur?"

"M. le Comte de la Fère is now waiting to see your majesty."

The king and Saint-Aignan at this reply exchanged a look which betrayed more uneasiness than surprise. Louis hesitated for a moment, but immediately afterwards, seeming to make up his mind, he said:

"Go, Saint-Aignan, and find Louise; inform her of the plot against us; do not let her be ignorant that Madame will return to her system of persecutions against her, and

that she has set those to work who would have found it far safer to remain neuter."

"Sire——"

"If Louise gets nervous and frightened, reassure her as much as you can; tell her that the king's affection is an impenetrable shield over her; if, which I suspect is the case, she already knows everything, or if she has already been herself subjected to an attack of some kind or other from any quarter, tell her, be sure to tell her, Saint-Aignan," added the king, trembling with passion, "tell her, I say, that this time, instead of defending her, I will avenge her, and that too so terribly that no one will in future even dare to raise his eyes towards her."

"Is that all, sire?"

"Yes, all. Go as quickly as you can, and remain faithful; for you who live in the midst of this state of infernal torments have not, like myself, the hope of the paradise beyond it."

Saint-Aignan exhausted himself in protestations of devotion, took the king's hand, kissed it, and left the room radiant with delight.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

KING AND NOBLE.

The king endeavored to recover his self-possession as quickly as possible, in order to meet M. de la Fère with an untroubled countenance. He clearly saw it was not mere chance that had induced the comte's visit, he had some vague impression of its importance; but he felt that to a man of Athos's tone of mind, to one of such a high order of intellect, his first reception ought not to present anything either disagreeable or otherwise than kind and

courteous. As soon as the king had satisfied himself that, as far as appearances went, he was perfectly calm again, he gave directions to the ushers to introduce the comte. A few minutes afterwards Athos, in full court dress, and with his breast covered with the orders that he alone had the right to wear at the court of France, presented himself with so grave and solemn an air that the king perceived, at the first glance, that he was not deceived in his anticipations. Louis advanced a step towards the comte, and, with a smile, held out his hand to him, over which Athos bowed with the air of the deepest respect.

"Monsieur le Comte de la Fère," said the king rapidly, "you are so seldom here, that it is a real piece of good fortune to see you."

Athos bowed and replied, "I should wish always to enjoy the happiness of being near your majesty."

The tone, however, in which this reply was conveyed, evidently signified, "I should wish to be one of your majesty's advisers, to save you the commission of faults." The king felt it so, and determined in this man's presence to preserve all the advantages which could be derived from his command over himself, as well as from his rank and position.

"I see you have something to say to me," he said.

"Had it not been so, I should not have presumed to present myself before your majesty."

"Speak quickly, I am anxious to satisfy you," returned the king, seating himself.

"I am persuaded," replied Athos, in a somewhat agitated tone of voice, "that your majesty will give me every satisfaction."

"Ah!" said the king, with a certain haughtiness of manner, "you have come to lodge a complaint here, then?"

"It would be a complaint," returned Athos, "only in

the event of your majesty—but if you will deign to permit me, sire, I will begin the conversation from the very commencement."

"Do so, I am listening."

"Your majesty will remember that at the period of the Duke of Buckingham's departure, I had the honor of an interview with you"

"At or about that period, I think I remember you did; only, with regard to the subject of the conversation, I have quite forgotten it."

Athos started, as he replied, "I shall have the honor to remind your majesty of it. It was with regard to a formal demand I had addressed to you respecting a marriage which M. de Bragelonne wished to contract with Mademoiselle de la Vallière"

"Ah!" thought the king, "we have come to it now.—I remember," he said, aloud.

"At that period," pursued Athos, "your majesty was so kind and generous towards M. de Bragelonne and myself, that not a single word which then fell from your lips has escaped my memory; and, when I asked your majesty to accord me Mademoiselle de La Vallière's hand for M. de Bragelonne, you refused."

"Quite true," said Louis, dryly.

"Alleging," Athos hastened to say, "that the young lady had no position in society."

Louis could hardly force himself to listen with an appearance of royal propriety.

"That," added Athos, "she had but little fortune."

The king threw himself back in his arm-chair.

"That her extraction was indifferent."

A renewed impatience on the part of the king.

"And little beauty," added Athos, pitilessly.

This last bolt buried itself deep in the king's heart, and made him almost bound from his seat.

"You have a good memory, monsieur," he said.

"I invariably have, on occasions when I have had the distinguished honor of an interview with your majesty," retorted the comte, without being in the least disconcerted.

"Very good: it is admitted that I said all that."

"And I thanked your majesty for your remarks at the time, because they testified an interest in M. de Bragelonne, which did him much honor."

"And you may possibly remember," said that king, very deliberately, "that you had the greatest repugnance for this marriage."

"Quite true, sire."

"And that you solicited my permission, much against your own inclination?"

"Yes, sire."

"And, finally, I remember, for I have a memory nearly as good as your own; I remember, I say, that you observed at the time: 'I do not believe that Mademoiselle de la Vallière loves M. de Bragelonne.' Is that true?"

The blow told well, but Athos did not draw back. "Sire," he said, "I have already begged your majesty's forgiveness; but there are certain particulars in that conversation which are only intelligible from the *dénouement*."

"Well, what is the *dénouement*, monsieur?"

"This: your majesty then said, 'that you would defer the marriage out of regard for M. de Bragelonne's own interests.'"

The king remained silent. "M. de Bragelonne is now so exceedingly unhappy that he cannot any longer defer asking your majesty for a solution of the matter."

The king turned pale; Athos looked at him with fixed attention.

"And what," said the king, with considerable hesitation, "does M. de Bragelonne request?"

"Precisely the very thing that I came to ask your majesty for at my last audience, namely, your majesty's consent to his marriage."

The king remained perfectly silent. "The questions which referred to the different obstacles in the way are all now quite removed for us," continued Athos. "Mademoiselle de la Vallière, without fortune, birth, or beauty, is not the less on that account the only good match in the world for M. de Bragelonne, since he loves this young girl."

The king pressed his hands impatiently together. "Does your majesty hesitate?" inquired the comte, without losing a particle either of his firmness or his politeness.

"I do not hesitate—I refuse," replied the king.

Athos paused a moment, as if to collect himself: "I have had the honor," he said, in a mild tone, "to observe to your majesty that no obstacle now interferes with M. de Bragelonne's affections, and that his determination seems unalterable."

"There is my will—and that is an obstacle, I should imagine!"

"That is the most serious of all," Athos replied quickly.

"Ah!"

"And may we, therefore, be permitted to ask your majesty, with the greatest humility, your reason for this refusal?"

"The reason!—A question to me!" exclaimed the king.

"A demand, sire!"

The king leaning with both his hands upon the table said, in a deep tone of concentrated passion: "You have lost all recollection of what is usual at court. At court, please to remember, no one ventures to put a question to the king."

"Very true, sire; but if men do not question they conjecture."

"Conjecture! What may that mean, monsieur?"

"Very frequently, sire, conjecture with regard to a particular subject implies a want of frankness on the part of the king——"

"Monsieur!"

"And a want of confidence on the part of the subject," pursued Athos, intrepidly.

"You forget yourself," said the king, hurried away by anger in spite of all his self-control.

"Sire, I am obliged to seek elsewhere for what I thought I should find in your majesty. Instead of obtaining a reply from you, I am compelled to make one for myself."

The king rose. "Monsieur le comte," he said, "I have now given you all the time I had at my disposal." This was a dismissal.

"Sire," replied the comte, "I have not yet had time to tell your majesty what I came with the express object of saying, and I so rarely see your majesty that I ought to avail myself of the opportunity."

"Just now you spoke rudely of conjectures; you are now becoming offensive, monsieur."

"Oh, sire! offend your majesty! I?—never! All my life through have I maintained that kings are above all other men, not only from their rank and power, but from their nobleness of heart and their true dignity of mind. I never can bring myself to believe that my sovereign, he who passed his word to me, did so with a mental reservation."

"What do you mean? what mental reservation do you allude to?"

"I will explain my meaning," said Athos, coldly. "If, in refusing Mademoiselle de la Vallière to Monsieur de Bragelonne, your majesty had some other object in view than the happiness and fortune of the vicomte——"

"You perceive, monsieur, that you are offending me."

"If, in requiring the vicomte to delay his marriage, your majesty's only object was to remove the gentleman to whom Mademoiselle de la Vallière was engaged——"

"Monsieur! monsieur!"

"I have heard it said so in every direction, sire. Your majesty's affection for Mademoiselle de la Vallière is spoken of on all sides."

The king tore his gloves, which he had been biting for some time. "Woe to those," he cried, "who interfere in my affairs. I have made up my mind to take a particular course, and I will break through every obstacle in my way."

"What obstacle?" said Athos.

The king stopped short, like a horse which, having taken the bit between his teeth and run away, finds it has slipped back again, and that his career is checked. "I love Mademoiselle de la Vallière," he said, suddenly, with mingled nobleness of feeling and passion.

"But," interrupted Athos, "that does not preclude your majesty from allowing M. de Bragelonne to marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière. The sacrifice is worthy of so great a monarch; it is fully merited by M. de Bragelonne, who has already rendered great service to your majesty, and who may well be regarded as a brave and worthy man. Your majesty, therefore, in renouncing the affection you entertain, offers a proof at once of generosity, gratitude, and good policy."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière does not love M. de Bragelonne," said the king, hoarsely.

"Does your majesty know that to be the case?" remarked Athos, with a searching look.

"I do know it."

"Since a very short time, then; for, doubtless, had your majesty known it when I first preferred my request, you would have taken the trouble to inform me of it."

"Since a very short time, it is true, monsieur."

Athos remained silent a moment, and then resumed: "In that case, I do not understand why your majesty should have sent M. de Bragelonne to London. That exile, and most properly so too, is a matter of astonishment to every one who regards your majesty's honor with sincere affection."

"Who presumes to impugn my honor, Monsieur de la Fère?"

"The king's honor, sire, is made up of the honor of his whole nobility. Whenever the king offends one of his gentlemen, that is, whenever he deprives him of the smallest particle of his honor, it is from him, from the king himself, that that portion of honor is stolen."

"Monsieur de la Fère!" said the king, haughtily.

"Sire, you sent M. de Bragelonne to London either before you were Mademoiselle de la Vallière's lover, or since you have become so."

The king, irritated beyond measure, especially because he felt that he was being mastered, endeavored to dismiss Athos by a gesture.

"Sire," replied the comte, "I will tell you all; I will not leave your presence until I have been satisfied either by your majesty or by myself; satisfied, if you prove to me that you are right,—satisfied, if I prove to you that you are wrong. Nay, sire, you can but listen to me. I am old now, and I am attached to everything that is really great and really powerful in your kingdom. I am of those who have shed their blood for your father and for yourself, without ever having asked a single favor either from yourself or from your father. I have never inflicted the slightest wrong or injury on any one in this world, and even kings are still my debtors. You can but listen to me, I repeat. I have come to ask you for an account of the honor of one of your servants whom you have deceived

by a falsehood, or betrayed by want of heart or judgment. I know that these words irritate your majesty, but the facts themselves are killing us. I know you are endeavoring to find some means whereby to chastise me for my frankness; but I know also the chastisement I will implore God to inflict upon you when I relate to Him your perjury and my son's unhappiness."

The king during these remarks was walking hurriedly to and fro, his hand thrust into the breast of his coat, his head haughtily raised, his eyes blazing with wrath. "Monsieur," he cried, suddenly, "if I acted towards you as a king, you would be already punished, but I am only a man, and I have the right to love in this world every one who loves me,—a happiness which is so rarely found."

"You cannot pretend to such a right as a man any more than as a king, sire; or if you intended to exercise that right in a loyal manner, you should have told M. de Bragelonne so, and not have exiled him."

"It is too great a condescension, monsieur, to discuss these things with you," interrupted Louis XIV., with that majesty of air and manner he alone seemed able to give to his look and his voice.

"I was hoping that you would reply to me," said the comte.

"You shall know my reply, monsieur."

"You already know my thoughts on the subject," was the Comte de la Fère's answer.

"You have forgotten you are speaking to the king, monsieur. It is a crime."

"You have forgotten you are destroying the lives of two men, sire. It is a mortal sin."

"Leave the room!"

"Not until I have said this: 'Son of Louis XIII., you begin your reign badly, for you begin it by abduction and disloyalty! My race—myself too—are now freed from all

that affection and respect towards you, which I made my son swear to observe in the vaults of Saint-Denis, in the presence of the relics of your noble forefathers. You are now become our enemy, sire, and henceforth we have nothing to do save with Heaven alone, our sole master. Be warned, be warned, sire."

"What! do you threaten?"

"Oh, no," said Athos, sadly, "I have as little bravado as fear in my soul. The God of whom I spoke to you is now listening to me; He knows that for the safety and honor of your crown I would even yet shed every drop of blood twenty years of civil and foreign warfare have left in my veins. I can well say, then, that I threaten the king as little as I threaten the man; but I tell you, sire, you lose two servants; for you have destroyed faith in the heart of the father, and love in the heart of the son; the one ceases to believe in the royal word, the other no longer believes in the loyalty of man, or the purity of woman: the one is dead to every feeling of respect, the other to obedience. Adieu!"

Thus saying, Athos broke his sword across his knee, slowly placed the two pieces upon the floor, and saluting the king, who was almost choking from rage and shame, he quitted the cabinet. Louis, who sat near the table, completely overwhelmed, was several minutes before he could collect himself; but he suddenly rose and rang the bell violently. "Tell M. D'Artagnan to come here," he said to the terrified ushers.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AFTER THE STORM.

Our readers will doubtlessly have been asking themselves how it happened that Athos, of whom not a word has been said for some time past, arrived so very opportunely at court. We will, without delay, endeavor to satisfy their curiosity.

Porthos, faithful to his duty as an arranger of affairs, had, immediately after leaving the Palais-Royal, set off to join Raoul at the Mimmes in the Bois de Vincennes, and had related everything, even to the smallest details, which had passed between Saint Aignan and himself. He finished by saying that the message which the king had sent to his favorite would probably not occasion more than a short delay, and that Saint-Aignan, as soon as he could leave the king would not lose a moment in accepting the invitation Raoul had sent him.

But Raoul, less credulous than his old friend, had concluded from Porthos's recital, that if Saint-Aignan was going to the king, Saint-Aignan would tell the king everything; and that the king would most assuredly forbid Saint-Aignan to obey the summons he had received to the hostile meeting. The consequence of his reflections was, that he had left Porthos to remain at the place appointed for the meeting, in the very improbable case that Saint-Aignan would come there; having endeavored to make Porthos promise that he would not remain there more than an hour or an hour and a half at the very longest. Porthos, however, formally refused to do

anything of the kind, but, on the contrary, installed himself in the Minimes as if he were going to take root there, making Raoul promise that when he had been to see his father, he would return to his own apartments, in order that Porthos's servant might know where to find him in case M. de Saint-Aignan should happen to come to the rendezvous.

Bragelonne had left Vincennes, and proceeded at once straight to the apartments of Athos, who had been in Paris during the last two days, the comte having been already informed of what had taken place, by a letter from D'Artagnan. Raoul arrived at his father's; Athos, after having held out his hand to him, and embraced him most affectionately, made a sign for him to sit down.

"I know you come to me as a man would go to a friend, vicomte, whenever he is suffering; tell me, therefore, what is it that brings you now"

The young man bowed, and began his recital; more than once in the course of it his tears almost choked his utterance, and a sob, checked in his throat, compelled him to suspend his narrative for a few minutes. However, he finished at last. Athos most probably already knew how matters stood, as we have just now said D'Artagnan had already written to him; but, preserving until the conclusion that calm, unruffled composure of manner which constituted the almost superhuman side of his character, he replied, "Raoul, I do not believe there is a word of truth in these rumors; I do not believe in the existence of what you fear, although I do not deny that persons best entitled to the fullest credit have already conversed with me on the subject. In my heart and soul I think it utterly impossible that the king could be guilty of such an outrage on a gentleman. I will answer for the king, therefore, and will soon bring you back the proof of what I say."

Raoul, wavering like a drunken man between what he had seen with his own eyes and the imperturbable faith he had in a man who had never told a falsehood, bowed and simply answered, "Go, then, monsieur le comte; I will await your return." And he sat down, burying his face in his hands. Athos dressed, and then left him, in order to wait upon the king; the result of that interview is already known to our readers.

When he returned to his lodgings, Raoul, pale and dejected, had not quitted his attitude of despair. At the sound, however, of the opening doors, and of his father's footsteps as he approached him, the young man raised his head. Athos's face was very pale, his head uncovered, and his manner full of seriousness; he gave his cloak and hat to the lackey, dismissed him with a gesture, and sat down near Raoul.

"Well, monsieur," inquired the young man, "are you convinced yet?"

"I am, Raoul; the king loves Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"He confesses it, then?" cried Raoul.

"Yes," replied Athos.

"And she?"

"I have not seen her."

"No; but the king spoke to you about her. What did he say?"

"He says that she loves him."

"Oh, you see—you see, monsieur!" said the young man, with a gesture of despair.

"Raoul," resumed the comte, "I told the king, believe me, all that you yourself could possibly have urged, and I believe I did so in becoming language, though sufficiently firm."

"And what did you say to him, monsieur?"

"I told him, Raoul, that everything was now at an end

between him and ourselves; that you would never serve him again. I told him that I, too, should remain aloof. Nothing further remains for me, then, but to be satisfied of one thing."

"What is that, monsieur?"

"Whether you have determined to adopt any steps."

"Any steps? Regarding what?"

"With reference to your disappointed affection, and—your ideas of vengeance."

"Oh, monsieur, with regard to my affection, I shall, perhaps, some day or other, succeed in tearing it from my heart; I trust I shall do so, aided by Heaven's merciful help, and your own wise exhortations. As far as vengeance is concerned, it occurred to me only when under the influence of an evil thought, for I could not revenge myself upon the one who is actually guilty; I have, therefore, already renounced every idea of revenge."

"And so you no longer think of seeking a quarrel with M. de Saint-Aignan?"

"No, monsieur; I sent him a challenge: if M. de Saint-Aignan accepts it, I will maintain it; if he does not take it up, I will leave things as they are."

"And La Vallière?"

"You cannot, I know, have seriously thought that I should dream of revenging myself upon a woman!" replied Raoul, with a smile so sad that a tear started even to the eyes of his father, who had so many times in the course of his life been bowed beneath his own sorrows and those of others.

He held out his hand to Raoul, which the latter seized most eagerly.

"And so, monsieur le comte, you are quite satisfied that the misfortune is one beyond all remedy?" inquired the young man.

"Poor boy!" he murmured.

"You think that I still live in hope," said Raoul, "and you pity me. Oh, it is indeed horrible suffering for me to despise, as I am bound to do, the one I have loved so devotedly. If I had but some real cause of complaint against her, I should be happy, I should be able to forgive her."

Athos looked at his son with a profoundly sorrowful air, for the words Raoul had just pronounced seemed to have issued out of his own heart. At this moment the servant announced M. d'Artagnan. This name sounded very differently to the ears of Athos and of Raoul. The musketeer entered the room with a vague smile on his lips. Raoul paused. Athos walked towards his friend with an expression of face that did not escape Bragelonne. D'Artagnan answered Athos's look by an imperceptible movement of the eyelid; and then, advancing towards Raoul, whom he took by the hand, he said, addressing both father and son, "Well, you are trying to console this poor boy, it seems"

"And you, kind and good as usual, have come to help me in my difficult task"

As he said this, Athos pressed D'Artagnan's hand between both his own. Raoul fancied he observed in this pressure something beyond the sense his mere words conveyed.

"Yes," replied the musketeer, smoothing his mustache with the hand that Athos had left free, "yes, I have come too."

"You are most welcome, chevalier; not for the consolation you bring with you, but on your own account. I am already consoled," said Raoul; and he attempted to smile, but the effort was more sad than any tears D'Artagnan had ever seen shed.

"That is all well and good, then," said D'Artagnan.

"Only," continued Raoul, "you have arrived just as

the comte was about to give me the details of his interview with the king. You will allow the comte to continue?" added the young man, as, with his eyes fixed on the musketeer, he seemed to read the very depths of his heart.

"His interview with the king?" said D'Artagnan, in a tone so natural and unassumed that there was no means of suspecting that his astonishment was feigned. "You have seen the king, then, Athos?"

Athos smiled as he said, "Yes, I have seen him."

"Ah, indeed; you were unaware, then, that the comte had seen his majesty?" inquired Raoul, half reassured.

"Yes, indeed, quite so."

"In that case, I am less uneasy," said Raoul.

"Uneasy—and about what?" inquired Athos.

"Forgive me, monsieur," said Raoul, "but knowing so well the regard and affection you have for me, I was afraid you might possibly have expressed somewhat plainly to his majesty my own sufferings and your indignation, and that the king had consequently——"

"And that the king had consequently?" repeated D'Artagnan; "well, go on, finish what you were going to say."

"I have now to ask you to forgive me, Monsieur D'Artagnan," said Raoul. "For a moment, and I cannot help confessing it, I trembled lest you had come here, not as M. D'Artagnan, but as captain of the musketeers."

"You are mad, my poor boy," cried D'Artagnan, with a burst of laughter, in which an exact observer might perhaps have wished to have heard a little more frankness.

"So much the better," said Raoul.

"Yes, mad; and do you know what I would advise you to do?"

"Tell me, monsieur, for the advice is sure to be good as it comes from you."

"Very good, then; I advise you, after your long journey

from England, after your visit to M. de Guiche, after your visit to Madame, after your visit to Porthos, after your journey to Vincennes, I advise you, I say, to take a few hours' rest; go and lie down, sleep for a dozen hours, and when you wake up, go and ride one of my horses until you have tired him to death."

And drawing Raoul towards him he embraced him as he would have done his own child. Athos did the like; only it was very visible that the kiss was still more affectionate, and the pressure of his lips even warmer with the father than with the friend. The young man again looked at both his companions, endeavoring to penetrate their real meaning, or their real feelings, with the utmost strength of his intelligence; but his look was powerless upon the smiling countenance of the musketeer, or upon the calm and composed features of the Comte de la Fère.

"Where are you going, Raoul?" inquired the latter, seeing that Bragelonne was preparing to go out.

"To my own apartments," replied the latter, in his soft, sad voice.

"We shall be sure to find you there, then, if we should have anything to say to you?"

"Yes, monsieur; but do you suppose it likely you will have something to say to me?"

"How can I tell?" said Athos.

"Yes, something fresh to console you with," said D'Artagnan, pushing him towards the door.

Raoul, observing the perfect composure which marked every gesture of his two friends, quitted the comte's room, carrying away with him nothing but the individual feeling of his own particular distress.

"Thank Heaven," he said, "since that is the case, I need only think of myself."

And wrapping himself in his cloak, in order to conceal from the passers-by in the streets his gloomy and sorrowful

face, he quitted them, for the purpose of returning to his own rooms, as he had promised Porthos. The two friends watched the young man as he walked away with a feeling of genuine disinterested pity; only each expressed it in a different way.

"Poor Raoul!" said Athos, sighing deeply.

"Poor Raoul!" said D'Artagnan, shrugging his shoulders.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HEU! MISER!

"Poor Raoul!" had said Athos. "Poor Raoul!" had said D'Artagnan: and, in point of fact, to be pitied by both these men, Raoul must indeed have been most unhappy. And therefore when he found himself alone face to face, as it were, with his own troubles, leaving behind him the intrepid friend and the indulgent father; when he recalled the avowal of the king's affection, which had robbed him of Louise de la Vallière, whom he loved so deeply, he felt his heart almost breaking, as indeed we all have at least once in our lives, at the first illusion destroyed, the first affection betrayed. "Oh!" he murmured, "all is over, then. Nothing is now left me in this world. Nothing to look forward to, nothing to hope for. Guiche has told me so, my father has told me so, M. d'Artagnan has told me so. All life is but an idle dream. The future, which I have been hopelessly pursuing for the last ten years, is a dream! the union of hearts, a dream! a life of love and happiness, a dream! Poor fool that I am," he continued, after a pause, "to dream away my existence aloud, publicly, and in the face of others, friends and enemies—and for what purpose, too? in order that my

friends may be saddened by my troubles, and my enemies may laugh at my sorrows. And so my unhappiness will soon become a notorious disgrace, a public scandal; and who knows but that to-morrow I may even be a public laughing-stock?"

And, despite the composure which he had promised his father and D'Artagnan to observe, Raoul could not resist uttering a few words of darkest menace. "And yet," he continued, "if my name were De Wardes, and if I had the pliancy of character and strength of will of M. d'Artagnan, I should laugh, with my lips at least; I should convince other women that this perfidious girl, honored by the affection I have wasted on her, leaves me only one regret, that of having been abused and deceived by her seemingly modest and irreproachable conduct; a few might perhaps fawn on the king by jesting at my expense; I should put myself on the track of some of those buffoons; I should chastise a few of them, perhaps; the men would fear me, and by the time I had laid three dying or dead at my feet, I should be adored by the women. Yes, yes, that indeed would be the proper course to adopt, and the Comte de la Fère himself would not object to it. Has not he also been tried, in his earlier days, in the same manner as I have just been tried myself? Did he not replace affection by intoxication? He has often told me so. Why should not I replace love by pleasure? He must have suffered as much as I suffer, even more—if that is possible. The history of one man is the history of all, a dragging trial, more or less prolonged, more or less bitter—sorrowful. The note of human nature is nothing but one sustained cry. But what are the sufferings of others compared to those from which I am now suffering? Does the open wound in another's breast soften the anguish of the gaping ulcer in our own? Does the blood which is welling from another man's side stanch that which is

pouring from our own? Does the general grief of our fellow-creatures lessen our own private and particular woe? No, no, each suffers on his own account, each struggles with his own grief, each sheds his own tears. And besides," he went on, "what has my life been up to the present moment? A cold, barren, sterile arena, in which I have always fought for others, never for myself. Sometimes for a king, sometimes for a woman. The king has betrayed, the woman disdained me. Miserable, unlucky wretch that I am! Women! Can I not make all expiate the crime of one of their sex? What does that need? To have a heart no longer, or to forget that I ever had one; to be strong, even against weakness itself; to lean always, even when one feels that the support is giving way. What is needed to attain, or succeed in all that? To be young, handsome, strong, valiant, rich. I am, or shall be, all that. But honor?" he still continued, "and what is honor after all? A theory which every man understands in his own way. My father tells me: 'Honor is the consideration of what is due to others, and particularly what is due to oneself.' But Guiche, and Manicamp, and Saint-Aignan particularly, would say to me: 'What's honor? Honor consists in studying and yielding to the passions and pleasures of one's king.' Honor such as that indeed, is easy and productive enough. With honor like that, I can keep my post at the court, become a gentleman of the chamber, and accept the command of a regiment, which may at any time be presented to me. With honor such as that, I can be duke and peer.

"The stain which that woman has stamped upon me, the grief that has broken my heart, the heart of the friend and playmate of her childhood, in no way affect M. de Bragelonne, an excellent officer, a courageous leader, who will cover himself with glory at the first encounter, and who will become a hundred times greater than Mademoi-

selle de la Vallière is to-day, the mistress of the king—for the king will not marry her—and the more publicly he will proclaim her as his mistress, the more opaque will grow the shadow of shame he casts upon her face, in the guise of a crown; and in proportion as others despise, as I despise her, I shall be gleaning honors in the field. Alas! we had walked together side by side, she and I, during the earliest, the brightest, the most angelic portion of our existence, hand in hand along the charming path of life, covered with the blossoms of youth; and then, alas! we reach a cross-road, where she separates herself from me, in which we have to follow a different route, whereby we become more and more widely separated from each other. And to attain the end of this path, oh, Heaven! I am now alone, in utter despair, and crushed to the very earth!"

Such were the sinister reflections in which Raoul indulged, when his foot mechanically paused at the door of his own dwelling. He had reached it without remarking the streets through which he passed, without knowing how he had come; he pushed open the door, continued to advance, and ascended the staircase. The staircase, as in most of the houses at that period, was very dark, and the landings most obscure. Raoul lived on the first floor; he paused in order to ring. Olivain appeared, took his sword and cloak from his hands; Raoul himself opened the door which, from the antechamber, led into a small *salon*, richly furnished enough for the *salon* of a young man, and completely filled with flowers by Olivain, who, knowing his master's tastes, had shown himself studiously attentive in gratifying them, without caring whether his master perceived his attention or not. There was a portrait of La Vallière in the *salon*, which had been drawn by herself and given by her to Raoul. This portrait, fastened above a large easy-chair covered with

dark colored damask, was the first point towards which Raoul bent his steps—the first object on which he fixed his eyes. It was, moreover, Raoul's usual habit to do so; every time he entered his room, this portrait, before anything else, attracted his attention. This time, as usual, he walked straight up to the portrait, placed his knees upon the arm-chair, and paused to look at it sadly. His arms were crossed upon his breast, his head slightly thrown back, his eyes filled with tears, his mouth worked into a bitter smile. He looked at the portrait of the one he had so tenderly loved; and then all that he had said passed before his mind again, all that he had suffered seemed again to assail his heart; and, after a long silence, he murmured for the third time, "Miserable, unlucky wretch that I am!"

He had hardly pronounced these words, when he heard the sound of a sigh and a groan behind him. He turned sharply round, and perceived, in the angle of the *salon*, standing up, a bending veiled female figure, which he had been the means of concealing behind the door as he opened it, and which he had not perceived as he entered. He advanced toward this figure, whose presence in his room had not been announced to him; and as he bowed, and inquired at the same moment who she was, she suddenly raised her head, and removed the veil from her face, revealing her pale and sorrow-stricken features. Raoul staggered back, as if he had seen a ghost.

"Louise!" he cried, in a tone of such absolute despair, one could hardly have thought the human voice was capable of so desponding a cry, without the snapping of the human heart.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WOUNDS WITHIN WOUNDS.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE for it was indeed she —advanced a few steps towards him. "Yes—Louise," she murmured.

But this interval, short as it had been, was quite sufficient for Raoul to recover himself. "You, mademoiselle?" he said; and then added, in an indefinable tone, "You here!"

"Yes, Raoul," the young girl replied, "I have been waiting for you."

"I beg your pardon. When I came into the room I was not aware——"

"I know—but I entreated Olivain not to tell you——" She hesitated; and as Raoul did not attempt to interrupt her, a moment's silence ensued, during which the sound of their throbbing hearts might have been heard, not in unison with each other, but the one beating as violently as the other. It was for Louise to speak, and she made an effort to do so.

"I wished to speak to you," she said. "It was absolutely necessary that I should see you—myself—alone. I have not hesitated to adopt a step which must remain secret; for no one, except yourself, could understand my motive, Monsieur de Bragelonne."

"In fact, mademoiselle," Raoul stammered out, almost breathless from emotion, "as far as I am concerned, and despite the good opinion you have of me, I confess——"

"Will you do me the great kindness to sit down and

listen to me?" said Louise, interrupting him with her soft, sweet voice.

Bragelonne looked at her for a moment; then, mournfully shaking his head, he sat or rather fell down on a chair. "Speak," he said.

She cast a glance all round her. This look was a timid entreaty, and implored secrecy far more effectually than her expressed words had done a few minutes before. Raoul rose, and went to the door, which he opened. "Olivain," he said, "I am not within for any one." And then, turning towards Louise, he added, "Is not that what you wished?"

Nothing could have produced a greater effect upon Louise than these few words, which seemed to signify, "You see that I still understand you." She passed a handkerchief across her eyes, in order to remove a rebellious tear which she could not restrain; and then, having collected herself for a moment, she said, "Raoul, do not turn your kind, frank look away from me. You are not one of those men who despise a woman for having given her heart to another, even though her affection might render him unhappy, or might wound his pride." Raoul did not reply.

"Alas!" continued La Vallière, "it is only too true, my cause is a bad one, and I cannot tell in what way to begin. It will be better for me, I think, to relate to you, very simply, everything that has befallen me. As I shall speak but the pure and simple truth, I shall always find my path clear before me in spite of the obscurity and obstacles I have to brave in order to solace my heart, which is full to overflowing, and wishes to pour itself out at your feet."

Raoul continued to preserve the same unbroken silence. La Vallière looked at him with an air that seemed to say, "Encourage me; for pity's sake, but a single word!"

But Raoul did not open his lips; and the young girl was obliged to continue:—

"Just now," she said, "M. de Saint-Aignan came to me by the king's directions." She cast down her eyes as she said this; while Raoul, on his side, turned his away, in order to avoid looking at her. "M. de Saint-Aignan came to me from the king," she repeated, "and told me that you knew all;" and she attempted to look Raoul in the face, after inflicting this further wound upon him, in addition to the many others he had already received; but it was impossible to meet Raoul's eyes.

"He told me you were incensed with me—and justly so, I admit."

This time Raoul looked at the young girl, and a smile full of disdain passed across his lips.

"Oh!" she continued, "I entreat you, do not say that you have had any other feeling against me than that of anger merely. Raoul, wait until I have told you all—wait until I have said to you all that I had to say—all that I came to say."

Raoul, by the strength of his own iron will, forced his features to assume a calmer expression, and the disdainful smile upon his lip passed away.

"In the first place," said La Vallière, "in the first place, with my hands raised in entreaty towards you, with my forehead bowed to the ground before you, I entreat you, as the most generous, as the noblest of men, to pardon, to forgive me. If I have left you in ignorance of what was passing in my own bosom, never, at least, would I have consented to deceive you. O! I entreat you, Raoul—I implore you on my knees—answer me one word, even though you wrong me in doing so. Better, far better, an injurious word from your lips, than suspicion resting in your heart."

"I admire your subtlety of expression, mademoiselle,"

said Raoul, making an effort to remain calm. "To leave another in ignorance that you are deceiving him, is loyal; but to deceive him—it seems that would be very wrong, and that you would not do it."

"Monsieur, for a long time I thought that I loved you better than anything else; and so long as I believed in my affection for you, I told you that I loved you. I could have sworn it on the altar; but a day came when I was undeceived."

"Well, on that day, mademoiselle, knowing that I still continued to love you, true loyalty of conduct should have forced you to inform me you had ceased to love me."

"But on that day, Raoul—on that day, when I read in the depths of my own heart, when I confessed to myself that you no longer filled my mind entirely, when I saw another future before me than that of being your friend, your life-long companion, your wife—on that day, Raoul, you were not, alas! any more beside me."

"But you knew where I was, mademoiselle; you could have written to me."

"Raoul, I did not dare to do so. Raoul, I have been weak and cowardly. I knew you so thoroughly—I knew how devotedly you loved me, that I trembled at the bare idea of the grief I was about to cause you; and that is so true, Raoul, that this very moment I am now speaking to you, bending thus before you, my heart crushed in my bosom, my voice full of sighs, my eyes full of tears, it is so perfectly true, that I have no other defense than my frankness, I have no other sorrow greater than that which I read in your eyes."

Raoul attempted to smile.

"No!" said the young girl, with a profound conviction, "no, no; you will not do me so foul a wrong as to disguise your feelings before me now! You loved me; you

were sure of your affection for me; you did not deceive yourself; you did not lie to your own heart—whilst I— I ——" And pale as death, her arms thrown despairingly above her head, she fell upon her knees.

"Whilst you," said Raoul, "you told me you loved me, and yet you loved another."

"Alas, yes!" cried the poor girl; "alas, yes! I do love another; and that other—oh! for Heaven's sake let me say it, Raoul, for it is my only excuse—that other I love better than my own life, better than my own soul even. Forgive my fault, or punish my treason, Raoul. I came here in no way to defend myself, but merely to say to you: 'You know what it is to love!'—in such a case am I! I love to that degree, that I would give my life, my very soul, to the man I love. If he should ever cease to love me, I shall die of grief and despair, unless Heaven come to my assistance, unless Heaven does show pity upon me. Raoul, I came here to submit myself to your will, whatever it might be—to die, if it were your wish I should die. Kill me then, Raoul! if in your heart you believe I deserve death."

"Take care, mademoiselle!" said Raoul; "the woman who invites death is one who has nothing but her heart's blood to offer to her deceived and betrayed lover."

"You are right," she said.

Raoul uttered a deep sigh, as he exclaimed, "And you love without being able to forget?"

"I love without a wish to forget; without a wish ever to love any one else," replied La Vallière.

"Very well," said Raoul. "You have said to me, in fact, all you had to say; all I could possibly wish to know. And now, mademoiselle, it is I who ask your forgiveness, for it is I who have almost been an obstacle in your life; I, too, who have been wrong, for, in deceiving myself, I helped to deceive you."

"Oh!" said La Vallière, "I do not ask you so much as that, Raoul."

"I only am to blame, mademoiselle," continued Raoul; "better informed than yourself of the difficulties of this life, I should have enlightened you. I ought not to have relied upon uncertainty; I ought to have extracted an answer from your heart, whilst I hardly even sought an acknowledgment from your lips. Once more, mademoiselle, it is I who ask your forgiveness."

"Impossible, impossible!" she cried, "you are mocking me."

"How, impossible?"

"Yes, it is impossible to be so good, and kind, ah! perfect to such a degree as that."

"Take care!" said Raoul, with a bitter smile, "for presently you may say perhaps I did not love you."

"Oh! you love me like an affectionate brother; let me hope that, Raoul."

"As a brother! undeceive yourself, Louise. I love you as a lover—as a husband, with the deepest, the truest, the fondest affection."

"Raoul, Raoul!"

"As a brother! Oh, Louise! I love you so deeply, that I would have shed my blood for you, drop by drop; I would, oh! how willingly, have suffered myself to be torn to pieces for your sake, have sacrificed my very future for you. I love you so deeply, Louise, that my heart feels dead and crushed within me,—my faith in human nature all is gone,—my eyes have lost their light; I loved you so deeply, that I now no longer see, think of, care for, anything, either in this world or in the next."

"Raoul—dear Raoul! spare me, I implore you!" cried La Vallière. "Oh! if I had but known——"

"It is too late, Louise; you love, you are happy in your affection; I read your happiness through your tears—

behind the tears which the loyalty of your nature makes you shed; I feel the sighs your affection breathes forth. Louise, Louise, you have made me the most abjectly wretched man living; leave me, I entreat you. Adieu! adieu!"

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me, Raoul, for what I have done!"

"Have I not done more, much more? *Have I not told you that I love you still?*" She buried her face in her hands.

"And to tell you that—do you hear me, Louise?—to tell you that, at such a moment as this, to tell you that, as I have told you, is to pronounce my own sentence of death. Adieu!" La Vallière held out her hands to him in vain.

"We ought not to see each other again in this world," he said, and as she was on the point of crying out in bitter agony at this remark, he placed his hand on her mouth to stifle the exclamation. She pressed her lips upon it, and fell fainting to the ground. "Olivain," said Raoul, "take this young lady and bear her to the carriage which is waiting for her at the door." As Olivain lifted her up, Raoul made a movement as if to dart towards La Vallière, in order to give her a first and last kiss, but, stopping abruptly, he said, "No! she is not mine. I am no thief—as is the king of France." And he returned to his room, whilst the lackey carried La Vallière, still fainting, to the carriage.

CHAPTER XL.

WHAT RAOUL HAD GUESSED.

As soon as Raoul quitted Athos and D'Artagnan, as the two exclamations that had followed his departure escaped their lips, they found themselves face to face alone. Athos immediately resumed the earnest air that he had assumed at D'Artagnan's arrival.

"Well," he said, "what have you come to announce to me, my friend?"

"I?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Yes; I do not see you in this way without some reason for it," said Athos, smiling.

"The deuce!" said D'Artagnan.

"I will place you at your ease. The king is furious, I suppose?"

"Well, I must say he is not altogether pleased."

"And you have come to arrest me, then?"

"My dear friend, you have hit the very mark."

"Oh, I expected it. I am quite ready to go with you."

"Deuce take it!" said D'Artagnan, "what a hurry you are in."

"I am afraid of delaying you," said Athos, smiling.

"I have plenty of time. Are you not curious, besides, to know how things went on between the king and me?"

"If you will be good enough to tell me, I will listen with the greatest of pleasure," said Athos, pointing out to D'Artagnan a large chair, into which the latter threw himself, assuming the easiest possible attitude.

"Well, I will do so willingly enough," continued D'Artagnan, "for the conversation is rather curious, I must say. In the first place the king sent for me."

"As soon as I had left?"

"You were just going down the last steps of the staircase, as the musketeers told me. I arrived. My dear Athos, he was not red in the face merely, he was positively purple. I was not aware, of course, of what had passed; only, on the ground, lying on the floor, I saw a sword broken in two."

"'Captain D'Artagnan,' cried the king, as soon as he saw me.

"'Sire,' I replied.

"'M. de la Fère has just left me; he is an insolent man.'

"'An insolent man!' I exclaimed, in such a tone that the king stopped suddenly short.

"'Captain D'Artagnan,' resumed the king, with his teeth clenched, 'you will be good enough to listen to and hear me.'

"'That is my duty, sire.'

"'I have, out of consideration for M. de la Fère, wished to spare him—he is a man of whom I still retain some kind recollections—the discredit of being arrested in my palace. You will therefore take a carriage.' At this I made a slight movement.

"'If you object to arrest him yourself,' continued the king, 'send me my captain of the guards.'

"'Sire,' I replied, 'there is no necessity for the captain of the guards, since I am on duty.'

"'I should not like to annoy you,' said the king, kindly, 'for you have always served me well, Monsieur D'Artagnan.'

"'You do not "annoy" me, sire,' I replied; 'I am on duty, that is all.'

"'But,' said the king, in astonishment, 'I believe the comte is your friend?'

"'If he were my father, sire, it would not make me less on duty than I am.'

"The king looked at me; he saw how unmoved my face was, and seemed satisfied. 'You will arrest M. le Comte de la Fère, then?' he inquired.

"'Most certainly, sire, if you give me the order to do so.'

"'Very well; I order you to do so.'

"I bowed, and replied, 'Where is the comte, sire?'

"'You will look for him.'

"'And I am to arrest him, wherever he may be?'

"'Yes; but try that he may be at his own house. If he should have started for his own estate, leave Paris at once, and arrest him on his way thither.'

"I bowed; but as I did not move, he said, 'Well, what are you waiting for?'

"'For the order to arrest the comte, signed by yourself.'

"The king seemed annoyed; for, in point of fact, it was the exercise of a fresh act of authority, a repetition of the arbitrary act, if, indeed, it is to be considered as such. He took hold of his pen slowly, and evidently in no very good temper; and then he wrote, 'Order for M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan, captain of my musketeers, to arrest M. le Comte de la Fère, wherever he is to be found.' He then turned towards me; but I was looking on without moving a muscle of my face. In all probability he thought he perceived something like bravado in my tranquil manner, for he signed hurriedly, and then handing me the order, he said, 'Go, monsieur!' I obeyed; and here I am."

Athos pressed his friend's hand. "Well, let us set off," he said.

"Oh! surely," said D'Artagnan, "you must have some

trifling matters to arrange before you leave your apartments in this manner."

"I?—not at all."

"Why not?"

"Why, you know, D'Artagnan, that I have always been a very simple traveler on this earth, ready to go to the end of the world by the order of my sovereign; ready to quit it at the summons of my Maker. What does a man who is thus prepared require in such a case?—a portmanteau, or a shroud? I am ready at this moment, as I have always been, my dear friend, and can accompany you at once."

"But, Bragelonne——"

"I have brought him up in the same principles I laid down for my own guidance; and you observed, that as soon as he perceived you he guessed, that very moment, the motive of your visit. We have thrown him off his guard for a moment; but do not be uneasy, he is sufficiently prepared for my disgrace not to be too much alarmed at it. So, let us go."

"Very well, let us go;" said D'Artagnan, quietly.

"As I broke my sword in the king's presence, and threw the pieces at his feet, I presume that will dispense with the necessity of delivering it over to you."

"You are quite right; and besides that, what the deuce do you suppose I could do with your sword?"

"Am I to walk behind, or before you?" inquired Athos, laughing.

"You will walk arm-in-arm with me," replied D'Artagnan, as he took the comte's arm to descend the staircase; and in this manner they arrived at the landing. Grimaud, whom they had met in the anteroom, looked at them as they went out together in this manner, with some little uneasiness; his experience of affairs was quite sufficient to give him good reason to suspect that there was something wrong.

"Ah! is that you, Grimaud?" said Athos, kindly. "We are going——"

"To take a turn in my carriage," interrupted D'Artagnan, with a friendly nod of the head.

Grimaud thanked D'Artagnan by a grimace, which was evidently intended for a smile, and accompanied both the friends to the door. Athos entered first into the carriage; D'Artagnan followed him without saying a word to the coachman. The departure had taken place so quietly, that it excited no disturbance or attention even in the neighborhood. When the carriage had reached the quays, "You are taking me to the Bastile, I perceive," said Athos.

"I?" said D'Artagnan, "I take you wherever you may choose to go; nowhere else, I can assure you."

"What do you mean?" said the comte, surprised.

"Why, surely, my dear friend," said D'Artagnan, "you quite understand that I undertook the mission with no other object in view than that of carrying it out exactly as you liked. You surely did not expect that I was going to get you thrown into prison like that, brutally, and without any reflection. If I had anticipated that, I should have let the captain of the guards undertake it."

"And so——?" said Athos.

"And so, I repeat again, we will go wherever you may choose."

"My dear friend," said Athos, embracing D'Artagnan, "how like you that is!"

"Well, it seems simple enough to me. The coachman will take you to the barrier of the Cours-la-Reine; you will find a horse there which I have ordered to be kept ready for you; with that horse you will be able to do three posts without stopping; and I on my side, will take care not to return to the king, to tell him that you have gone away, until the very moment it will be impossible

to overtake you. In the meantime you will have reached Havre, and from Havre across to England, where you will find the charming residence of which M. Monk made me a present, without speaking of the hospitality which King Charles will not fail to show you. Well, what do you think of this project?"

Athos shook his head, and then said, smiling as he did so, "No, no, take me to the Bastile."

"You are an obstinate fellow, my dear Athos," returned D'Artagnan, "reflect for a few moments."

"On what subject?"

"That you are no longer twenty years of age. Believe me, I speak according to my own knowledge and experience. A prison is certain death for men who are at our time of life. No, no; I will never allow you to languish in prison in such a way. Why the very thought of it makes my head turn giddy."

"Dear D'Artagnan," Athos replied, "Heaven most fortunately made my body as strong, powerful, and enduring as my mind; and, rely upon it, I shall retain my strength up to the very last moment."

"But this is not strength of mind or character; it is sheer madness."

"No, D'Artagnan, it is the highest order of reasoning. Do not suppose that I should in the slightest degree in the world discuss the question with you, whether you would not be ruined in endeavoring to save me. I should have done precisely as you propose if flight had been part of my plan of action; I should, therefore, have accepted from you what, without any doubt, you would have accepted from me. No! I know you too well even to breathe a word upon the subject."

"Ah! if you would only let me do it," said D'Artagnan, "what a dance we would give his most gracious majesty!"

"Still he is the king; do not forget that, my dear friend."

"Oh! that is all the same to me; and king though he be, I would plainly tell him, 'Sire, imprison, exile, kill every one in France and Europe; order me to arrest and poniard even whom you like—even were it Monsieur, your own brother; but do not touch one of the four musketeers, or if so, *mordioux!*"

"My dear friend," replied Athos, with perfect calmness, "I should like to persuade you of one thing; namely, that I wish to be arrested; that I desire above all things that my arrest should take place."

D'Artagnan made a slight movement of his shoulders.

"Nay; I wish it, I repeat, more than anything; if you were to let me escape, it would be only to return of my own accord, and constitute myself a prisoner. I wish to prove to this young man, who is dazzled by the power and splendor of his crown, that he can be regarded as the first and chiefest among men only on the one condition of his proving himself to be the most generous and the wisest. He may punish me, imprison, torture me, it matters not. He abuses his opportunities, and I wish him to learn the bitterness of remorse, while Heaven teaches him what chastisement is."

"Well, well," replied D'Artagnan, "I know only too well, that when you have once said 'no,' you mean 'no.' I do not insist any longer; you wish to go to the Bastile?"

"I do wish to go there."

"Let us go, then! To the Bastile!" cried D'Artagnan to the coachman. And throwing himself back in the carriage, he gnawed the ends of his mustache with a fury which, for Athos, who knew him well, signified a resolution either already taken or in course of formation. A profound silence ensued in the carriage, which con-

tinued to roll on, but neither faster nor slower than before. Athos took the musketeer by the hand.

"You are not angry with me, D'Artagnan?" he said.

"I!—oh, no! certainly not; of course not. What you do from heroism, I should have done from obstinacy."

"But you are quite of opinion, are you not, that Heaven will avenge me, D'Artagnan?"

"And I know one or two on earth who will not fail to lend a helping hand," said the captain.

CHAPTER XLI.

THREE GUESTS ASTONISHED TO FIND THEMSELVES AT SUPPER TOGETHER.

The carriage arrived at the outside gate of the Bastile. A soldier on guard stopped it, but D'Artagnan had only to utter a single word to procure admittance, and the carriage passed on without further difficulty. Whilst they were proceeding along the covered way which led to the courtyard of the governor's residence, D'Artagnan, whose lynx eyes saw everything, even through the walls, suddenly cried out, "What is that out yonder?"

"Well," said Athos, quietly; "what is it?"

"Look yonder, Athos."

"In the courtyard?"

"Yes, yes; make haste!"

"Well, a carriage; very likely conveying a prisoner like myself."

"That would be too droll."

"I do not understand you."

"Make haste and look again, and look at the man who is just getting out of that carriage."

At that very moment a second sentinel stopped D'Artagnan, and while the formalities were being gone through, Athos could see at a hundred paces from him the man whom his friend had pointed out to him. He was, in fact, getting out of the carriage at the door of the governor's house. "Well," inquired D'Artagnan, "do you see him?"

"Yes; he is a man in a gray suit."

"What do you say of him?"

"I cannot very well tell; he is, as I have just now told you, a man in a gray suit, who is getting out of a carriage; that is all."

"Athos, I will wager anything that it is he."

"He, who?"

"Aramis."

"Aramis arrested? Impossible!"

"I do not say he is arrested, since we see him alone in his carriage."

"Well, then, what is he doing here?"

"Oh! he knows Baisemeaux, the governor," replied the musketeer, slyly; "so we have arrived just in time."

"What for?"

"In order to see what we can see."

"I regret this meeting exceedingly. When Aramis sees me, he will be very much annoyed, in the first place, at seeing me, and in the next at being seen."

"Very well reasoned."

"Unfortunately, there is no remedy for it; whenever any one meets another in the Bastile, even if he wished to draw back to avoid him, it would be impossible."

"Athos, I have an idea; the question is, to spare Aramis the annoyance you were speaking of, is it not?"

"What is to be done?"

"I will tell you; or in order to explain myself in the best possible way let me relate the affair in my own

manner; I will not recommend you to tell a falsehood, for that would be impossible for you to do; but I will tell falsehoods enough for both; it is easy to do that when one is born to the nature and habits of a Gascon."

Athos smiled. The carriage stopped where the one we have just now pointed out had stopped; namely, at the door of the governor's house. "It is understood, then?" said D'Artagnan, in a low voice to his friend. Athos consented by a gesture. They ascended the staircase. There will be no occasion for surprise at the facility with which they had entered into the Bastile, if it be remembered that, before passing the first gate, in fact, the most difficult of all, D'Artagnan had announced that he had brought a prisoner of state. At the third gate, on the contrary, that is to say, when he had once fairly entered the prison, he merely said to the sentinel, "To M. Baisemeaux;" and they both passed on. In a few minutes they were in the governor's dining-room, and the first face which attracted D'Artagnan's observation was that of Aramis, who was seated side by side with Baisemeaux, awaiting the announcement of a meal whose odor impregnated the whole apartment. If D'Artagnan pretended surprise, Aramis did not pretend at all; he started when he saw his two friends, and his emotion was very apparent. Athos and D'Artagnan, however, complimented him as usual, and Baisemeaux, amazed, completely stupefied by the presence of his three guests, began to perform a few evolutions around them.

"By what lucky accident——"

"We were just going to ask you," retorted D'Artagnan.

"Are we going to give ourselves up as prisoners?" cried Aramis, with an affectation of hilarity.

"Ah! ah!" said D'Artagnan; "it is true the walls smell deucedly like a prison. Monsieur de Baisemeaux,

you know you invited me to sup with you the other day."

"I?" cried Baisemeaux.

"Yes, of course you did, although you now seem so struck with amazement. Don't you remember it?"

Baisemeaux turned pale and then red, looked at Aramis, who looked at him, and finished by stammering out, "Certainly—I am delighted—but, upon my honor—I have not the slightest—Ah! I have such a wretched memory."

"Well! I am wrong, I see," said D'Artagnan, as if he were offended.

"Wrong, what for?"

"Wrong to remember anything about it, it seems."

Baisemeaux hurried towards him. "Do not stand on ceremony, my dear captain," he said; "I have the worst memory in the world. I no sooner leave off thinking of my pigeons and their pigeon-house, than I am no better than the rawest recruit."

"At all events, you remember it now," said D'Artagnan boldly.

"Yes, yes," replied the governor, hesitating; "I think I do remember.'

"It was when you came to the palace to see me; you told me some story or other about your accounts with M. de Louvière and M. de Tremblay."

"Oh, yes! perfectly."

"And about M. d'Herblay's kindness towards you."

"Ah!" exclaimed Aramis, looking the unhappy governor full in the face, "and yet you just now said you had no memory, Monsieur de Baisemeaux."

Baisemeaux interrupted the musketeer in the midst of his revelations. "Yes, yes; you're quite right; how could I have forgotten; I remember it now as well as possible; I beg you a thousand pardons. But now, once

for all, my dear M. d'Artagnan, be sure that at this present time, as at any other, whether invited or not, you are perfectly at home here, you and M. d'Herblay, your friend," he said, turning towards Aramis; "and this gentleman, too," he added, bowing to Athos.

"Well, I thought it would be sure to turn out so," replied D'Artagnan, "and that is the reason I came. Having nothing to do this evening at the Palais-Royal, I wished to judge for myself what your ordinary style of living was like; and as I was coming along, I met the Comte de la Fère."

Athos bowed. "The comte, who had just left his majesty, handed me an order which required immediate attention. We were close by here; I wished to call in, even if it were for no other object than that of shaking hands with you and of presenting the comte to you, of whom you spoke so highly that evening at the palace when——"

"Certainly, certainly—M. le Comte de la Fère?"

"Precisely."

"The comte is welcome, I am sure."

"And he will sup with you two, I suppose, whilst I, unfortunate dog that I am, must run off on a matter of duty. Oh! what happy beings you are, compared to myself," he added, sighing as loud as Porthos might have done.

"And so you are going away, then?" said Aramis and Baisemeaux together, with the same expression of delighted surprise, the tone of which was immediately noticed by D'Artagnan.

"I leave you in my place," he said, "a noble and excellent guest." And he touched Athos gently on the shoulder, who, astonished also, could not help exhibiting his surprise a little; which was noticed by Aramis only, for M. de Baisemeaux was not quite equal to the three friends in point of intelligence.

"What, are you going to leave us?" resumed the governor.

"I shall only be about an hour, or an hour and a half. I will return in time for dessert."

"Oh! we will wait for you," said Baisemeaux.

"No, no; that would be really disobliging me."

"You will be sure to return, though?" said Athos, with an expression of doubt.

"Most certainly," he said, pressing his friend's hand confidentially; and he added, in a low voice, "Wait for me, Athos; be cheerful and lively as possible, and above all, don't allude even to business affairs, for heaven's sake."

And with a renewed pressure of the hand, he seemed to warn the comte of the necessity of keeping perfectly discreet and impenetrable. Baisemeaux led D'Artagnan to the gate. Aramis, with many friendly protestations of delight, sat down by Athos, determined to make him speak; but Athos possessed every virtue and quality to the very highest degree. If necessity had required it, he would have been the finest orator in the world, but on other occasions he would rather have died than have opened his lips.

Ten minutes after D'Artagnan's departure, the three gentlemen sat down to table, which was covered with the most substantial display of gastronomic luxury. Large joints, exquisite dishes, preserves, the greatest variety of wines, appeared successively upon the table, which was served at the king's expense, and of which expense M. Colbert would have found no difficulty in saving two thirds, without any one in the Bastile being the worse for it. Baisemeaux was the only one who ate and drank with gastronomic resolution. Aramis allowed nothing to pass by him, but merely touched everything he took; Athos, after the soup and three *hors d'œuvres*, ate nothing more,

The style of conversation was such as might have been anticipated between three men so opposite in temper and ideas. Aramis was incessantly asking himself by what extraordinary chance Athos was at Baisemeaux's when D'Artagnan was no longer there, and why D'Artagnan did not remain when Athos was there. Athos sounded all the depths of the mind of Aramis, who lived in the midst of subterfuge, evasion, and intrigue; he studied his man well and thoroughly, and felt convinced that he was engaged upon some important project. And then he too began to think of his own personal affair, and to lose himself in conjectures as to D'Artagnan's reason for having left the Bastile so abruptly, and for leaving behind him a prisoner so badly introduced and so badly looked after by the prison authorities. But we shall not pause to examine into the thoughts and feelings of these personages, but will leave them to themselves, surrounded by the remains of poultry, game, and fish, which Baisemeaux's generous knife and fork had so mutilated. We are going to follow D'Artagnan instead, who, getting into the carriage which had brought him, said to the coachman, "Return to the palace, as fast as the horses can gallop."

CHAPTER XLII.

WHAT TOOK PLACE AT THE LOUVRE DURING THE SUPPER AT THE BASTILE.

M. DE SAINT-AIGNAN had executed the commission with which the king had intrusted him for La Vallière—as we have already seen in one of the preceding chapters; but, whatever his eloquence, he did not succeed in persuading the young girl that she had in the king a protector

powerful enough for her under any combination of circumstances, and that she had no need of any one else in the world when the king was on her side. In point of fact, at the very first word which the favorite mentioned of the discovery of the famous secret, Louise, in a passion of tears, abandoned herself in utter despair to a sorrow which would have been far from flattering for the king, if he had been a witness of it from one of the corners of the room. Saint-Aignan, in his character of ambassador, felt almost as greatly offended at it as his master himself would have been, and returned to inform the king what he had seen and heard; and it is thus we find him in a state of great agitation, in the presence of the king, who was, if possible, in a state of even greater flurry than himself.

"But," said the king to the courtier, when the latter had finished his report, "what did she decide to do? Shall I at least see her presently before supper? Will she come to me, or shall I be obliged to go to her room?"

"I believe, sire, that if your majesty wishes to see her, you will not only have to take the first step in advance, but will have to go the whole way."

"That I do not mind. Do you think she has yet a secret fancy for young Bragelonne?" muttered the king between his teeth.

"Oh! sire, that is not possible; for it is you alone, I am convinced Mademoiselle de la Vallière loves, and that, too, with all her heart. But you know that De Bragelonne belongs to that proud race who play the part of Roman heroes."

The king smiled feebly; he knew how true the illustration was, for Athos had just left him.

"As for Mademoiselle de la Vallière," Saint-Aignan continued, "she was brought up under the care of the Dowager Madame, that is to say, in the greatest austerity

and formality. This young engaged couple coldly exchanged their little vows in the prim presence of the moon and stars; and now, when they find they have to break those vows asunder, it plays the very deuce with them."

Saint-Aignan thought to have made the king laugh; but on the contrary, from a mere smile Louis passed to the greatest seriousness of manner. He already began to experience that remorse which the comte had promised D'Artagnan he would inflict upon him. He reflected that, in fact, these young persons had loved and sworn fidelity to each other; that one of the two had kept his word, and that the other was too conscientious not to feel her perjury most bitterly. And his remorse was not unaccompanied; for bitter pangs of jealousy began to beset the king's heart. He did not say another word, and instead of going to pay a visit to his mother, or the queen, or Madame, in order to amuse himself a little, and make the ladies laugh, as he himself used to say, he threw himself into the huge arm-chair in which his august father Louis XIII. had passed so many weary days and years in company with Baradas and Cinq-Mars. Saint-Aignan perceived the king was not to be amused at that moment; he tried a last resource, and pronounced Louise's name, which made the king look up immediately. "What does your majesty intend to do this evening—shall Mademoiselle de la Vallière be informed of your intention to see her?"

"It seems she is already aware of that," replied the king. "No, no, Saint-Aignan," he continued, after a moment's pause, "we will both of us pass our time in thinking, and musing, and dreaming; when Mademoiselle de la Vallière shall have sufficiently regretted what she now regrets, she will deign, perhaps, to give us some news of herself."

"Ah! sire, is it possible you can so misunderstand her heart, which is so full of devotion?"

The king rose, flushed from vexation and annoyance; he was a prey to jealousy as well as to remorse. Saint-Aignan was just beginning to feel that his position was becoming awkward, when the curtain before the door was raised. The king turned hastily round; his first idea was that a letter from Louise had arrived; but, instead of a letter of love, he only saw his captain of musketeers, standing upright and perfectly silent in the doorway. "M. d'Artagnan," he said, "ah! Well, monsieur?"

D'Artagnan looked at Saint-Aignan; the king's eyes took the same direction as those of his captain; these looks would have been clear to any one, and for a still greater reason they were so for Saint-Aignan. The courtier bowed and quitted the room, leaving the king and D'Artagnan alone.

"Is it done?" inquired the king.

"Yes, sire," replied the captain of the musketeers, in a grave voice, "it is done."

The king was unable to say another word. Pride, however, obliged him not to pause at what he had done; whenever a sovereign has adopted a decisive course, even though it be unjust, he is compelled to prove all witnesses, and particularly to prove it to himself, that he was quite right all through. A good means for effecting that—an almost infallible means indeed—is, to try and prove his victim to be in the wrong. Louis brought up by Mazarin and Anne of Austria, knew better than any one else his vocation as a monarch; he therefore endeavored to prove it on the present occasion. After a few moments' pause which he had employed in making silently to himself the same reflections which we have just expressed aloud, he said, in an indifferent tone: "What did the comte say?"

"Nothing at all, sire."

"Surely he did not allow himself to be arrested without saying something?"

"He said he expected to be arrested, sire."

The king raised his head haughtily. "I presume," he said, "that M. le Comte de la Fère has not continued to play his obstinate and rebellious part."

"In the first place, sire, what do you wish to signify by *rebellious?*" quietly asked the musketeer. "A rebel, in the eyes of the king, is a man who not only allows himself to be shut up in the Bastile, but still more, who opposes those who do not wish to take him there."

"Who do not wish to take him there!" exclaimed the king. "What do you say, captain! Are you mad?"

"I believe not, sire."

"You speak of persons who did not wish to arrest M. de la Fère! Who are those persons, may I ask?"

"I should say those whom your majesty intrusted with that duty."

"But it was you whom I intrusted with it," exclaimed the king.

"Yes, sire; it was I."

"And yet you say that, despite my orders, you had the intention of not arresting the man who had insulted me!"

"Yes, sire—that was really my intention. I even proposed to the comte to mount a horse that I had had prepared for him at the Barrière de la Conférence."

"And what was your object in getting this horse ready?"

"Why, sire, in order that M. le Comte de la Fère might be able to reach Havre, and from that place make his escape to England."

"You betrayed me, then, monsieur?" cried the king, kindling with a wild pride.

"Exactly so."

There was nothing to say in answer to statements made in such a tone; the king was astounded at such an obstinate

and open resistance on the part of D'Artagnan. "At least you had a reason, Monsieur d'Artagnan, for acting as you did?" said the king, proudly.

"I have always a reason for everything, sire."

"Your reason cannot be your friendship for the comte, at all events,—the only one that can be of any avail, the only one that could possibly excuse you,—for I placed you perfectly at your ease in that respect."

"Me, sire?"

"Did I not give you the choice to arrest, or not to arrest M. le Comte de la Fère?"

"Yes, sire, but——"

"But what?" exclaimed the king, impatiently.

"But you warned me, sire, that if I did not arrest him, your captain of the guard should do so."

"Was I not considerate enough towards you, from the very moment I did not compel you to obey me?"

"To me, sire, you were, but not to my friend, for my friend would be arrested all the same, whether by myself or by the captain of the guards."

"And this is your devotion, monsieur! a devotion which argues and reasons. You are no soldier, monsieur!"

"I wait for your majesty to tell me what I am."

"Well, then—you are a Frondeur."

"And since there is no longer any Fronde, sire, in that case——"

"But if what you say is true——"

"What I say is always true, sire."

"What have you come to say to me, monsieur?"

"I have come to say to your majesty; 'Sire, M. de la Fère is in the Bastile.'"

"That is not your fault, it would seem."

"That is true, sire; but at all events he is there; and since he is there, it is important that your majesty should know it."

"Ah! Monsieur d'Artagnan, so you set your king at defiance."

"Sire——"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan! I warn you that you are abusing my patience."

"On the contrary, sire."

"What do you mean by 'on the contrary?'"

"I have come to get myself arrested too."

"To get yourself arrested,—you!"

"Of course. My friend will get wearied to death in the Bastile by himself; and I have come to propose to your majesty to permit me to bear him company; if your majesty will but give the word, I will arrest myself; I shall not need the captain of the guards for that, I assure you."

The king darted towards the table and seized hold of a pen to write the order for D'Artagnan's imprisonment. "Pay attention, monsieur, that this is forever," cried the king, in tones of sternest menace.

"I can quite believe that," returned the musketeer; "for when you have once done such an act as that, you will never be able to look me in the face again."

The king dashed down his pen violently. "Leave the room, monsieur!" he said.

"Not so, if it please your majesty."

"What is that you say?"

"Sire, I came to speak gently and temperately to your majesty; your majesty got into a passion with me; that is a misfortune; but I shall not the less on that account say what I had to say to you."

"Your resignation, monsieur,—your resignation!" cried the king.

"Sire, you know whether I care about my resignation or not, since at Blois, on the very day when you refused King Charles the million which my friend the Comte de

la Fère gave him, I then tendered my resignation to your majesty."

"Very well, monsieur—do it at once!"

"No, sire; for there is no question of my resignation at the present moment. Your majesty took up your pen just now to send me to the Bastile,—why should you change your intention?"

"D'Artagnan! Gascon that you are! who is the king, allow me to ask,—you or myself?"

"You, sire, unfortunately."

"What do you mean by 'unfortunately'?"

"Yes, sire; for if it were I——"

"If it were you, you would approve of M. d'Artagnan's rebellious conduct, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"Really!" said the king, shrugging his shoulders.

"And I should tell my captain of the musketeers," continued D'Artagnan, "I should tell him, looking at him all the while with human eyes, and not with eyes like coals of fire, 'M. d'Artagnan, I had forgotten that I was the king, for I descended from my throne in order to insult a gentleman.'"

"Monsieur," said the king, "do you think you can excuse your friend by exceeding him in insolence?"

"Oh, sire! I should go much farther than he did," said D'Artagnan: "and it would be your own fault. I should tell you what he, a man full of the finest sense of delicacy, did not tell you; I should say—'Sire, you have sacrificed his son, and he defended his son—you sacrificed himself; he addressed you in the name of honor, of religion, of virtue—you repulsed, drove him away, imprisoned him. I should be harder than he was, for I should say to you—'Sire; it is for you to choose. Do you wish to have friends or lackeys—soldiers or slaves—great men or mere puppets? Do you wish men to serve you, or to

bend and crouch before you? Do you wish men to love you, or to be afraid of you? If you prefer baseness, intrigue, cowardice, say so at once, sire, and we will leave you,—we who are the only individuals who are left,—nay, I will say more, the only models of the valor of former times; we who have done our duty, and have exceeded, perhaps, in courage and in merit, the men already great for posterity. Choose, sire! and that too without delay. Whatever relics remain to you of the great nobility, guard them with a jealous eye; you will never be deficient in courtiers. Delay not—and send me to the Bastile with my friend; for, if you did not know how to listen to the Comte de la Fère, whose voice is the sweetest and noblest in all the world when honor is the theme; if you do not know how to listen to D'Artagnan, the frankest and honestest voice of sincerity, you are a bad king, and to-morrow will be a poor king. And learn from me, sire, that bad kings are hated by their people, and poor kings are driven ignominiously away. That is what I had to say to you, sire; you were wrong to drive me to say it."

The king threw himself back in his chair, cold as death, and as livid as a corpse. Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet, he could not have been more astonished; he seemed as if his respiration had utterly ceased, and that he was at the point of death. The honest voice of sincerity, as D'Artagnan had called it, had pierced through his heart like a sword-blade.

D'Artagnan had said all he had to say. Comprehending the king's anger, he drew his sword, and, approaching Louis XIV. respectfully, he placed it on the table. But the king, with a furious gesture, thrust aside the sword, which fell on the ground and rolled to D'Artagnan's feet. Notwithstanding the perfect mastery which D'Artagnan exercised over himself, he, too, in his turn, became pale, and, trembling with indignation, said, "A king may dis-

grace a soldier,—he may exile him, and may even condemn him to death; but were he a hundred times a king, he has no right to insult him by casting a dishonor upon his sword! Sire, a king of France has never repulsed with contempt the sword of a man such as I am! Stained with disgrace as this sword now is, it has henceforth no other sheath than either your heart or my own! I choose my own, sire; and you have to thank Heaven and my own patience that I do so." Then snatching up his sword, he cried, "My blood be upon your head!" and, with a rapid gesture, he placed the hilt upon the floor and directed the point of the blade towards his breast. The king, however, with a movement far more rapid than that of D'Artagnan, threw his right arm around the musketeer's neck, and with his left hand seized hold of the blade by the middle, and returned it silently to the scabbard. D'Artagnan, upright, pale, and still trembling, let the king do all to the very end. Louis, overcome and softened by gentler feelings, returned to the table, took a pen in his hand, wrote a few lines, signed them, and then held it out to D'Artagnan.

"What is this paper, sire!" inquired the captain.

"An order for M. d'Artagnan to set the Comte de la Fère at liberty immediately."

D'Artagnan seized the king's hand, and imprinted a kiss upon it; he then folded the order, placed it in his belt, and quitted the room. Neither the king nor the captain had uttered a syllable.

"Oh, human heart! thou guide and director of kings," murmured Louis, when alone, "when shall I learn to read in your inmost recesses, as in the leaves of a book! Oh, I am not a bad king—nor am I a poor king; I am but still a child, when all is said and done."



CHAPTER XLIII.

POLITICAL RIVALS.

D'ARTAGNAN had promised M. de Baisemeaux to return in time for dessert, and he kept his word. They had just reached the finer and more delicate class of wines and liqueurs with which the governor's cellar had the reputation of being most admirably stocked, when the silver spurs of the captain resounded in the corridor, and he himself appeared at the threshold. Athos and Aramis had played a close game; neither of the two had been able to gain the slightest advantage over the other. They had supped, talked a good deal about the Bastile, of the last journey to Fontainebleau, of the intended *fête* that M. Fouquet was about to give at Vaux; they had generalized on every possible subject; and no one, excepting Baisemeaux, had in the slightest degree alluded to private matters. D'Artagnan arrived in the very midst of the conversation, still pale and much disturbed by his interview with the king. Baisemeaux hastened to give him a chair; D'Artagnan accepted a glass of wine, and set it down empty. Athos and Aramis both remarked his emotion; as for Baisemeaux, he saw nothing more than the captain of the king's musketeers, to whom he endeavored to show every possible attention. But, although Aramis had remarked his emotion, he had not been able to guess the cause of it. Athos alone believed he had detected it. For him, D'Artagnan's return, and particularly the manner in which he, usually so impassible, seemed overcome, signified, "I have just asked the king something which

the king has refused me." Thoroughly convinced that his conjecture was correct, Athos smiled, rose from the table, and made a sign to D'Artagnan, as if to remind him that they had something else to do than to sup together. D'Artagnan immediately understood him, and replied by another sign. Aramis and Baisemeaux watched this silent dialogue, and looked inquiringly at each other. Athos felt that he was called upon to give an explanation of what was passing.

"The truth is, my friend," said the Comte de la Fère, with a smile, "that you, Aramis, have been supping with a state criminal, and you, Monsieur de Baisemeaux, with your prisoner."

Baisemeaux uttered an exclamation of surprise, and almost of delight; for he was exceedingly proud and vain of his fortress; and for his own individual profit, the more prisoners he had, the happier he was; and the higher in rank the prisoners happened to be, the prouder he felt. Aramis assumed the expression of countenance he thought the position justified, and said, "Well, dear Athos, forgive me; but I almost suspected what has happened. Some prank of Raoul and La Vallière I suppose?"

"Alas!" said Baisemeaux.

"And," continued Aramis, "you, a high and powerful nobleman as you are, forgetful that courtiers now exist—you have been to the king, I suppose, and told him what you thought of his conduct?"

"Yes, you have guessed right."

"So that," said Baisemeaux, trembling at having supped so familiarly with a man who had fallen into disgrace with the king; "so that, monsieur le comte——"

"So that, my dear governor," said Athos, "my friend D'Artagnan will communicate to you the contents of the paper which I perceive just peeping out of his belt, and

which assuredly can be nothing else than the order for my incarceration."

Baisemeaux held out his hand with his accustomed eagerness. D'Artagnan drew two papers from his belt, and presented one of them to the governor, who unfolded it, and then read, in a low tone of voice, looking at Athos over the paper, as he did so, and pausing from time to time: "'Order to detain in my château of the Bastile Monsieur le Comte de la Fère.' Oh monsieur! this is indeed a very melancholy day for me."

"You will have a patient prisoner, monsieur," said Athos, in his calm, soft voice.

"A prisoner, too, who will not remain a month with you, my dear governor," said Aramis; while Baisemeaux, still holding the order in his hand, transcribed it upon the prison registry.

"Not a day, or rather not even a night," said D'Artagnan, displaying the second order of the king, "for now, dear M. de Baisemeaux, you will have the goodness to transcribe also this order for setting the comte immediately at liberty."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "it is a labor that you have deprived me of, D'Artagnan;" and he pressed the musketeer's hand in a significant manner, at the same moment as that of Athos.

"What!" said the latter in astonishment, "the king sets me at liberty!"

"Read, my dear friend," returned D'Artagnan.

Athos took the order and read it. "It is quite true," he said.

"Are you sorry for it?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Oh, no, on the contrary. I wish the king no harm; and the greatest evil or misfortune that any one can wish kings, is that they should commit an act of injustice.

But you have had a difficult and painful task, I know. Tell me, have you not, D'Artagnan?"

"I? not at all," said the musketeer, laughing: "the king does everything I wish him to do."

Aramis looked fixedly at D'Artagnan, and saw that he was not speaking the truth. But Baisemeaux had eyes for nothing but D'Artagnan, so great was his admiration for a man who seemed to make the king do all he wished.

"And does the king exile Athos?" inquired Aramis.

"No, not precisely; the king did not explain himself upon that subject," replied D'Artagnan; "but I think the comte could not well do better unless, indeed, he wishes particularly to thank the king——"

"No, indeed," replied Athos, smiling.

"Well, then, I think," resumed D'Artagnan, "that the comte cannot do better than to retire to his *own* château. However, my dear Athos, you have only to speak, to tell me what you want. If any particular place of residence is more agreeable to you than another, I am influential enough, perhaps, to obtain it for you."

"No, thank you," said Athos; "nothing can be more agreeable to me, my dear friend, than to return to my solitude beneath my noble trees on the banks of the Loire. If Heaven be the overruling physician of the evils of the mind, nature is a sovereign remedy. And so, monsieur," continued Athos, turning again towards Baisemeaux, "I am now free, I suppose?"

"Yes, monsieur le comte, I think so—at least, I hope so," said the governor, turning over and over the two papers in question, "unless, however, M. d'Artagnan has a third order to give me."

"No, my dear Monsieur Baisemeaux, no," said the musketeer; "the second is quite enough: we will stop there—if you please."

"Ah! monsieur le comte," said Baisemeaux addressing

Athos, "you do not know what you are losing. I should have placed you among the thirty-franc prisoners, like the generals—what am I saying?—I mean among the fifty-francs, like the princes, and you would have supped every evening as you have done to-night."

"Allow me, monsieur," said Athos, "to prefer my own simpler fare." And then, turning to D'Artagnan, he said, "Let us go, my dear friend. Shall I have that greatest of all pleasures for me—that of having you as my companion?"

"To the city gate only," replied D'Artagnan, "after which I will tell you what I told the king: 'I am on duty.'"

"And you, my dear Aramis," said Athos, smiling; "will you accompany me? La Fère is on the road to Vannes."

"Thank you, my dear friend," said Aramis, "but I have an appointment in Paris this evening, and I cannot leave without very serious interests uffering by my absence."

"In that case," said Athos, "I must say adieu, and take my leave of you. My dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux, I have to thank you exceedingly for your kind and friendly disposition towards me, and particularly for the enjoyable specimen you have given me of the ordinary fare of the Bastile." And, having embraced Aramis, and shaken hands with M. de Baisemeaux, and having received best wishes for a pleasant journey from them both, Athos set off with D'Artagnan.

Whilst the *dénouement* of the scene of the Palais-Royal was taking place at the Bastile, let us relate what was going on at the lodgings of Athos and Bragelonne. Grimaud, as we have seen, had accompanied his master to Paris; and, as we have said, he was present when Athos went out; he had observed D'Artagnan gnaw the

corners of his mustache; he had seen his master get into the carriage; he had narrowly examined both their countenances, and he had known them both for a sufficiently long period to read and understand, through the mask of their impassibility, that something serious was the matter. As soon as Athos had gone, he began to reflect; he then, and then only, remembered the strange manner in which Athos had taken leave of him, the embarrassment—imperceptible as it would have been to any but himself—of the master whose ideas were, to him, so clear and defined, and the expression of whose wishes was so precise. He knew that Athos had taken nothing with him but the clothes he had on him at the time; and yet he seemed to fancy that Athos had not left for an hour merely; or even for a day. A long absence was signified by the manner in which he pronounced the word, "Adieu." All these circumstances recurred to his mind, with feelings of deep affection for Athos, with that horror of isolation and solitude which invariably besets the minds of those who love; and all these combined rendered poor Grimaud very melancholy, and particularly very uneasy. Without being able to account to himself for what he did since his master's departure, he wandered about the room, seeking, as it were for some traces of him, like a faithful dog, who is not exactly uneasy about his absent master, but at least is restless. Only as in addition to the instinct of the animal, Grimaud subjoined the reasoning faculties of the man, Grimaud therefore felt uneasy and restless too. Not having found any indication which could serve as a guide, and having neither seen nor discovered anything which could satisfy his doubts, Grimaud began to wonder what could possibly have happened. Besides, imagination is the resource, or rather the plague of gentle and affectionate hearts. In fact, never does a feeling heart represent its absent friend to itself as being happy or cheer-

ful. Never does the dove that wings its flight in search of adventures inspire anything but terror at home.

Grimaud soon passed from uneasiness to terror; he carefully went over, in his own mind, everything that had taken place; D'Artagnan's letter to Athos, the letter which had seemed to distress Athos so much after he had read it; then Raoul's visit to Athos, which resulted in Athos desiring him (Grimaud) to get his various orders and his court dress ready to put on; then his interview with the king, at the end of which Athos had returned home so unusually gloomy; then the explanation between the father and the son, at the termination of which Athos had embraced Raoul with such sadness of expression while Raoul himself went away equally weary and melancholy; and finally, D'Artagnan's arrival, biting, as if he were vexed, the end of his mustache, and his leaving again in the carriage, accompanied by the Comte de la Fère. All this composed a drama in five acts very clearly, particularly for so analytical an observer as Grimaud.

The first step he took was to search in his master's coat for M. d'Artagnan's letter; he found the letter still there, and its contents were found to run as follows:—

My dear Friend,—Raoul has been to ask me for some particulars about the conduct of Mademoiselle de la Vallière, during our young friend's residence in London. I am a poor captain of musketeers, and am sickened to death every day by hearing all the scandal of the barracks and bedside conversations. If I had told Raoul all I believe, I know the poor fellow would have died of it; but I am in the king's service, and cannot relate all I hear about the king's affairs. If your heart tells you to do it, set off at once; the matter concerns you more than it does myself, and almost as much as Raoul.

Grimaud tore, not a handful, but a finger-and-thumb-

ful of hair out of his head; he would have done more if his head of hair had been in a more flourishing condition.

"Yes," he said, "that is the key of the whole enigma. The young girl has been playing her pranks; what people say about her and the king is true, then; our young master has been deceived; he ought to know it. Monsieur le comte has been to see the king, and has told him a piece of his mind; and then the king sent M. d'Artagnan to arrange the affair. Ah! gracious goodness!" continued Grimaud, "monsieur le comte, I now remember, returned without his sword."

This discovery made the perspiration break out all over poor Grimaud's face. He did not waste any more time in useless conjecture, but clapped his hat on his head, and ran to Raoul's lodgings.

Raoul, after Louise and left him, had mastered his grief, if not his affection; and, compelled to look forward on that perilous road over which madness and revulsion were hurrying him, he had seen, from the very first glance, his father exposed to the royal obstinacy; since Athos had himself been the first to oppose any resistance to the royal will. At this moment, from a very natural sequence of feeling, the unhappy young man remembered the mysterious signs which Athos had made, and the unexpected visit of D'Artagnan; the result of the conflict between a sovereign and a subject revealed itself to his terrified vision. As D'Artagnan was on duty, that is, a fixture at his post without the possibility of leaving it, it was certainly not likely that he had come to pay Athos a visit merely for the pleasure of seeing him. He must have come to say something to him. This something in the midst of such painful conjectures must have been the news of either a misfortune or a danger. Raoul trembled at having been so selfish as to have forgotten his father for his affection; at having, in a

word, passed his time in idle dreams, or in an indulgence of despair, at a time when a necessity existed for repelling such an imminent attack on Athos. The very idea nearly drove him frantic; he buckled on his sword and ran towards his father's lodgings. On his way there he encountered Grimaud, who, having set off from the opposite pole, was running with equal eagerness in search of the truth. The two men embraced each other most warmly.

"Grimaud," exclaimed Raoul, "is the comte well?"

"Have you seen him?"

"No; where is he?"

"I am trying to find out."

"And M. d'Artagnan?"

"Went out with him."

"When?"

"Ten minutes after you left."

"In what way did they go out?"

"In a carriage.'

"Where did they go?"

"I have no idea at all."

"Did my father take any money with him?"

"No."

"Or his sword?"

"No."

"I have an idea, Grimaud, that M. d'Artagnan came in order to——"

"Arrest monsieur le comte, do you not think, monsieur?"

"Yes, Grimaud."

"I could have sworn it."

"What road did they take?"

"The way leading towards the quay."

"To the Bastile, then?"

"Yes, yes."

"Quick, quick; let us run."

"Yes, let us not lose a moment."

"But where are we to go to?" said Raoul, overwhelmed.

"We will go to M. d'Artagnan's first, we may perhaps learn something there."

"No; if they keep me in ignorance at my father's, they will do the same everywhere. Let us go to—— Oh, good heavens! why, I must be mad to-day, Grimaud; I have forgotten M. du Vallon, who is waiting for and expecting me still."

"Where is he then?"

"At the Minimes of Vincennes."

"Thank goodness, that is on the same side as the Bastile. I will run and saddle the horses, and we will go at once," said Grimaud.

"Do, my friend, do."

CHAPTER XLIV.

IN WHICH PORTHOS IS CONVINCED WITHOUT HAVING UNDERSTOOD ANYTHING.

THE good and worthy Porthos, faithful to all the laws of ancient chivalry, had determined to wait for M. de Saint-Aignan until sunset; and as Saint-Aignan did not come, as Raoul had forgotten to communicate with his second, and as he found that waiting so long was very wearisome, Porthos had desired one of the gate-keepers to fetch him a few bottles of good wine and a good joint of meat,—so that at least, he might pass away the time by means of a glass or two and a mouthful of something to eat. He had just finished when Raoul arrived, escorted by Grimaud, both of them riding at full speed. As soon as Porthos saw the two cavaliers riding at such a pace along the road, he did not for a moment doubt but that

they were the men he was expecting, and he rose from the grass upon which he had been indolently reclining and began to stretch his legs and arms, saying, "See what it is to have good habits. The fellow has finished by coming, after all. If I had gone away he would have found no one here, and would have taken advantage of that." He then threw himself into a martial attitude, and drew himself up to the full height of his gigantic stature. But instead of Saint-Aignan, he only saw Raoul, who, with the most despairing gestures, accosted him by crying out, "pray forgive me, my dear friend, I am most wretched."

"Raoul!" cried Porthos, surprised.

"You have been angry with me?" said Raoul, embracing Porthos.

"I? What for?"

"For having forgotten you. But I assure you my head seems utterly lost. If you only knew!"

"You have killed him?"

"Who?"

"Saint-Aignan; or if that is not the case, what is the matter?"

"The matter is, that Monsieur le Comte de la Fère has by this time been arrested."

Porthos gave a start that would have thrown down a wall.

"Arrested," he cried out; "by whom?"

"By D'Artagnan."

"It is impossible," said Porthos.

"My dear friend, it is perfectly true."

Porthos turned towards Grimaud, as if he needed a second confirmation of the intelligence. Grimaud nodded his head. "And where have they taken him?"

"Probably to the Bastile."

"What makes you think that?"

"As we came along we questioned some persons, who saw the carriage pass; and others who saw it enter the Bastile."

"Oh!" muttered Porthos.

"What do you intend to do?" inquired Raoul.

"I? Nothing; only I will not have Athos remain at the Bastile."

"Do you know," said Raoul, advancing nearer to Porthos, "that the arrest was made by order of the king?"

Porthos looked at the young man, as if to say, "What does that matter to me?" This dumb language seemed so eloquent of meaning to Raoul, that he did not ask another question. He mounted his horse again; and Porthos, assisted by Grimaud, had already done the same.

"Let us arrange our plan of action," said Raoul.

"Yes," returned Porthos, "that is the best thing we can do."

Raoul sighed deeply, and then paused suddenly.

"What is the matter?" asked Porthos; "are you faint?"

"No, only I feel how utterly helpless our position is. Can we three pretend to go and take the Bastile?"

"Well, if D'Artagnan were only here," replied Porthos, "I am not so very certain we should fail."

Raoul could not resist a feeling of admiration at the sight of such perfect confidence, heroic in its simplicity. These were truly the celebrated men who, by three or four, attacked armies and assaulted castles! Men who had terrified death itself, who had survived the wrecks of a tempestuous age, and still stood, stronger than the most robust of the young.

"Monsieur," said he to Porthos, "you have just given me an idea; we absolutely must see M. d'Artagnan."

"Undoubtedly."

"He ought by this time to have returned home, after

having taken my father to the Bastile. Let us go to his house."

"First inquire at the Bastile," said Grimaud, who was in the habit of speaking little, but that to the purpose.

Accordingly, they hastened towards the fortress, when one of those chances which Heaven bestows on men of strong will, caused Grimaud suddenly to perceive the carriage, which was entering by the great gate of the drawbridge. This was the moment that D'Artagnan was, as we have seen, returning from his visit to the king. In vain was it that Raoul urged on his horse in order to join the carriage, and to see whom it contained. The horses had already gained the other side of the great gate, which again closed, while one of the sentries struck the nose of Raoul's horse with his musket; Raoul turned about only too happy to find he had ascertained something respecting the carriage which had contained his father.

"We have him," said Grimaud.

"If we wait a little it is certain he will leave; don't you think so, my friend?"

"Unless, indeed, D'Artagnan also be a prisoner," replied Porthos, "in which case everything is lost."

Raoul returned no answer, for any hypothesis was admissible. He instructed Grimaud to lead the horses to the little street Jean-Beausire, so as to give rise to less suspicion, and himself with his piercing gaze watched for the exit either of D'Artagnan or the carriage. Nor had he decided wrongly; for twenty minutes had not elapsed before the gate reopened and the carriage reappeared. A dazzling of the eyes prevented Raoul from distinguishing what figures occupied the interior. Grimaud averred that he had seen two persons, and that one of them was his master. Porthos kept looking at Raoul and Grimaud by turns, in the hope of understanding their idea.

"It is clear," said Grimaud, "that if the comte is in the

carriage, either he is set at liberty or they are taking him to another prison."

"We shall soon see that by the road he takes," answered Porthos.

"If he is set at liberty," said Grimaud, "they will conduct him home."

"True," rejoined Porthos.

"The carriage does not take that way," cried Raoul; and indeed the horses were just disappearing down the faubourg St. Antoine.

"Let us hasten," said Porthos; "we will attack the carriage on the road and tell Athos to flee."

"Rebellion," murmured Raoul.

Porthos darted a second glance at Raoul, quite worthy of the first. Raoul replied only by spurring the flanks of his steed. In a few moments the three cavaliers had overtaken the carriage, and followed it so closely that their horses' breath moistened the back of it. D'Artagnan, whose senses were ever on the alert, heard the trot of the horses, at the moment when Raoul was telling Porthos to pass the chariot, so as to see who was the person accompanying Athos. Porthos complied, but could not see anything, for the blinds were lowered. Rage and impatience were gaining mastery over Raoul. He had just noticed the mystery preserved by Athos's companion, and determined on proceeding to extremities. On his part D'Artagnan had perfectly recognized Porthos, and Raoul also, from under the blinds, and had communicated to the comte the result of his observation. They were desirous only of seeing whether Raoul and Porthos would push the affair to the uttermost. And this they speedily did, for Raoul presenting his pistol threw himself on the leader, commanding the coachman to stop. Porthos seized the coachman and dragged him from his seat. Grimaud already had hold of the carriage door. Raoul threw

open his arms, exclaiming, "M. le Comte! M. le Comte!"

"Ah! is it you, Raoul," said Athos, intoxicated with joy.

"Not bad, indeed!" added D'Artagnan, with a burst of laughter, and they both embraced the young man and Porthos, who had taken possession of them.

"My brave Porthos! best of friends," cried Athos, "it is still the same old way with you."

"He is still only twenty," said D'Artagnan, "brave Porthos!"

"Confound it," answered Porthos, slightly confused, "we thought that you were being arrested."

"While," rejoined Athos, "the matter in question was nothing but my taking a drive in M. d'Artagnan's carriage."

"But we followed you from the Bastile," returned Raoul, with a tone of suspicion and reproach.

"Where we had been to take supper with our friend M. Baisemeaux. Do you recollect Baisemeaux, Porthos?"

"Very well, indeed."

"And there we saw Aramis."

"In the Bastile?"

"At supper."

"Ah!" said Porthos, again breathing freely.

"He gave us a thousand messages to you."

"And where is M. le Comte going?" asked Grimaud, already recompensed by a smile from his master.

"We were going home to Blois."

"How can that be?"

"At once?" said Raoul.

"Yes, right forward."

"Without any luggage?"

"Oh! Raoul would have been instructed to forward me mine, or to bring it with him on his return *if* he returns."

"If nothing detains him longer in Paris," said D'Arta-

gnan, with a glance firm and cutting as steel, and as painful (for it reopened the poor young fellow's wounds), "he will do well to follow you, Athos."

"There is nothing to keep me any longer in Paris," said Raoul.

"Then we will go immediately," replied Athos.

"And M. d'Artagnan?"

"Oh! as for me, I was only accompanying Athos as far as the barrier, and I return with Porthos."

"Very good," said the latter.

"Come, my son," added the comte, gently passing his arm around Raoul's neck to draw him into the carriage, and again embracing him. "Grimaud," continued the comte, "you will return quietly to Paris with your horse and M. du Vallon's, for Raoul and I will mount here and give up the carriage to these two gentlemen to return to Paris in; and then, as soon as you arrive, you will take my clothes and letters and forward the whole to me at home."

"But," observed Raoul, who was anxious to make the comte converse, "when you return to Paris, there will not be a single thing there for you—which will be very inconvenient."

"I think it will be a very long time, Raoul, ere I return to Paris. The last sojourn we have made there has not been of a nature to encourage me to repeat it."

Raoul hung his head and said not a word more. Athos descended from the carriage and mounted the horse which had brought Porthos, and which seemed no little pleased at the exchange. Then they embraced, and clasped each other's hands, and interchanged a thousand pledges of eternal friendship. Porthos promised to spend a month with Athos at the first opportunity. D'Artagnan engaged to take advantage of his first leave of absence; and then, having embraced Raoul for the last time: "To you, my

boy," said he, "I will write." Coming from D'Artagnan, who he knew wrote very seldom, these words expressed everything. Raoul was moved even to tears. He tore himself away from the musketeer and departed."

D'Artagnan rejoined Porthos in the carriage: "Well," said he, "my dear friend, what a day we have had!"

"Indeed we have," answered Porthos.

"You must be quite worn out?"

"Not quite; however, I shall retire early to rest, so as to be ready for to-morrow."

"And wherefore?"

"Why! to complete what I have begun."

"You make me shudder, my friend, you seem to me quite angry. What the devil *have* you begun which is not finished?"

"Listen; Raoul has not fought, but I must fight!"

"With whom? with the king?"

"How!" exclaimed Porthos astounded, "with the king?"

"Yes, I say, you great baby, with the king."

"I assure you it is with M. Saint-Aignan."

"Look now, this is what I mean; you draw your sword against the king in fighting with this gentleman."

"Ah!" said Porthos, staring; "are you sure of it?"

"Indeed I am."

"What in the world are we to do then?"

"We must try and make a good supper, Porthos. The captain of the musketeers keeps a tolerable table. There you will see the handsome Saint-Aignan, and will drink his health."

"I!" cried Porthos, horrified.

"What!" said D'Artagnan, "you refuse to drink the king's health?"

"But, body alive! I am not talking to you about the king at all; I am speaking of M. de Saint-Aignan."

"But when I repeat that it is the same thing?"

"Ah, well, well!" said Porthos, overcome.
"You understand, don't you?"
"No," answered Porthos, "but 'tis all the same."

CHAPTER XLV.

M. DE BAISEMEAUX'S "SOCIETY."

THE reader has not forgotten that, on quitting the Bastile, D'Artagnan and the Comte de la Fère had left Aramis in close confabulation with Baisemeaux. When once these two guests had departed, Baisemeaux did not in the least perceive that the conversation suffered by their absence. He used to think that wine after supper, and that of the Bastile in particular, was excellent, and that it was a stimulant quite sufficient to make any honest man talkative. But he little knew his Greatness, who was never more impenetrable than at dessert. His Greatness, however, perfectly understood M. de Baisemeaux, when he reckoned on making the governor discourse by the means which the latter regarded as efficacious. The conversation, therefore, without flagging in appearance, flagged in reality; for Baisemeaux not only had it nearly all to himself, but further, kept speaking only of that singular event—the incarceration of Athos,—followed by so prompt an order to set him again at liberty. Nor, moreover, had Baisemeaux failed to observe that the two orders, of arrest and of liberation, were both in the king's hand. But then, the king would not take the trouble to write similar orders except under pressing circumstances. All this was very interesting, and, above all, very puzzling to Baisemeaux; but as on the other hand all this was very clear to Aramis, the latter did not attach to

the occurrence the same importance as did the worthy governor. Besides, Aramis, rarely put himself out of the way for anything, and he had not yet told M. de Baisemeaux for what reason he had now done so. And so at the very climax of Baisemeaux's dissertation, Aramis suddenly interrupted him.

"Tell me, my dear M. Baisemeaux," said he, "have you never any other diversions at the Bastile than those at which I assisted during the two or three visits I have had the honor to pay you?"

This address was so unexpected that the governor, like a vane which suddenly receives an impulsion opposed to that of the wind, was quite dumfounded at it. "Diversions!" said he; "but I take them continually, monseigneur."

"Oh, to be sure! And these diversions?"

"Are of every kind."

"Visits, no doubt?"

"No, not visits. Visits are not frequent at the Bastile."

"What, are visits rare, then?"

"Very much so."

"Even on the part of your society?"

"What do you term my society—the prisoners?"

"Oh, no!—your prisoners, indeed! I know well it is you who visit them, and not they you. By your society, I mean, my dear M. Baisemeaux, the society of which you are a member."

Baisemeaux looked fixedly at Aramis, and then, as if the idea which had flashed across his mind were impossible, "Oh," he said, "I have very little society at present. If I must own it to you, dear M. d'Herblay, the fact is, to stay at the Bastile appears, for the most part, distressing and distasteful to persons of the gay world. As for the ladies, it is never without a certain dread, which costs me infinite trouble to allay, that they succeed

in reaching my quarters. And, indeed, how should they avoid trembling a little, poor things, when they see those gloomy dungeons, and reflect that they are inhabited by prisoners who——" And in proportion as the eyes of Baisemeaux concentrated their gaze on the face of Aramis, the worthy governor's tongue faltered more and more until it ended by stopping altogether.

"No, you don't understand me, my dear M. Baisemeaux; you don't understand me. I do not at all mean to speak of society in general, but of a particular society—of *the* society, in a word—to which you are affiliated."

Baisemeaux nearly dropped the glass of muscat which he was in the act of raising to his lips. "Affiliated, cried he, "affiliated!"

"Yes, affiliated, undoubtedly," repeated Aramis, with the greatest self-possession. "Are you not a member of a secret society, my dear M. Baisemeaux?"

"Secret?"

"Secret or mysterious."

"Oh, M. d'Herblay!"

"Consider now, don't deny it."

"But believe me."

"I believe what I know."

"I swear to you."

"Listen to me, my dear M. Baisemeaux; I say yes, you say no; one of us two necessarily says what is true, and the other, it inevitably follows, what is false."

"Well, and then?"

"Well, we shall come to an understanding presently."

"Let us see," said Baisemeaux; "let us see."

"Now drink your glass of muscat, dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux," said Aramis. "What the devil! you look quite scared."

"No, no; not the least in the world; oh, no."

"Drink then." Baisemeaux drank, but he swallowed the wrong way.

"Well," resumed Aramis, "if I say you are not a member of a secret or mysterious society, which you like to call it, the epithet is of no consequence; if I say you are not a member of a society similar to that I wish to designate, well, then, you will not understand a word of what I am going to say. That is all."

"Oh! be sure beforehand, that I shall not understand anything."

"Well, well!"

"Try now; let us see!"

"That is what I am going to do."

"If, on the contrary, you are one of the members of this Society, you will immediately answer me—yes, or no."

"Begin your questions," continued Baisemeaux, trembling.

"You will agree, dear Monsieur de Baisemeaux," continued Aramis, with the same impassibility, "that it is evident a man cannot be a member of a society, it is evident that he cannot enjoy the advantages it offers to the affiliated, without being himself bound to certain little services."

"In short," stammered Baisemeaux, "that would be intelligible, if——"

"Well," resumed Aramis, "there is in the society of which I speak, and of which, as it seems you are not a member——"

"Allow me," said Baisemeaux. "I should not like to say absolutely."

"There is an engagement entered into by all the governors and captains of fortresses affiliated to the order." Baisemeaux grew pale.

"Now the engagement," continued Aramis firmly, "is of this nature."

Baisemeaux rose, manifesting unspeakable emotion: "Go on, dear M. d'Herblay: go on," said he.

Aramis then spoke, or rather recited the following paragraph, in the same tone as if he had been reading it from a book: "The aforesaid captain or governor of a fortress shall allow to enter, when need shall arise, and on demand of the prisoner, a confessor affiliated to the order." He stopped. Baisemeaux was quite distressing to look at, being so wretchedly pale and trembling. "Is not that the text of the agreement?" quietly asked Aramis.

"Monseigneur!" began Baisemeaux.

"Ah! well, you begin to understand, I think."

"Monseigneur," cried Baisemeaux, "do not trifle so with my unhappy mind! I find myself as nothing in your hands, if you have the malignant desire to draw from me the little secrets of my administration."

"Oh! by no means; pray undeceive yourself, dear M. Baisemeaux; it is not the little secrets of your administration, but those of your conscience that I aim at."

"Well, then, my conscience be it, dear M. d'Herblay. But have some consideration for the situation I am in, which is no ordinary one."

"It is no ordinary one, my dear monsieur," continued the inflexible Aramis, "if you are a member of this society; but it is quite a natural one if free from all engagement. You are answerable only to the king."

"Well, monsieur, well! I obey only the king, and whom else would you have a French nobleman obey?"

Aramis did not yield an inch; but with that silvery voice of his, continued, "It is very pleasant," said he, "for a French nobleman, for a prelate of France, to hear a man of your mark express himself so loyally, dear De Baisemeaux, and having heard you to believe no more than you do."

"Have you doubted, monsieur?"

"I? oh, no!"

"And so you doubt no longer?"

"I have no longer any doubt that such a man as you, monsieur," said Aramis, gravely, "does not faithfully serve the masters whom he voluntarily chose for himself."

"Masters!" cried Baisemeaux.

"Yes, masters, I said."

"Monsieur d'Herblay, you are still jesting, are you not?"

"Oh, yes! I understand that it is a more difficult position to have several masters than one; but the embarrassment is owing to you, my dear Baisemeaux, and I am not the cause of it."

"Certainly not," returned the unfortunate governor, more embarrassed than ever; "but what are you doing? You are leaving the table?"

"Assuredly."

"Are you going?"

"Yes, I am going."

"But you are behaving very strangely towards me, monseigneur."

"I am behaving strangely—how do you make that out?"

"Have you sworn, then, to put me to the torture?"

"No, I should be sorry to do so."

"Remain, then."

"I cannot."

"And why?"

"Because I have no longer anything to do here; and, indeed, I have duties to fulfil elsewhere."

"Duties, so late as this?"

"Yes; understand me now, my dear De Baisemeaux; they told me at the place whence I came, 'The aforesaid

governor or captain will allow to enter, as need shall arise, on the prisoner's demand, a confessor affiliated with the order.' I came; you do not know what I mean, and so I shall return to tell them that they are mistaken, and that they must send me elsewhere."

"What! you are——" cried Baisemeaux, looking at Aramis almost in terror.

"The confessor affiliated to the order," said Aramis, without changing his voice.

But, gentle as the words were, they had the same effect on the unhappy governor as a clap of thunder. Baisemeaux became livid, and it seemed to him as if Aramis's beaming eyes were two forks of flame, piercing to the very bottom of his soul. "The confessor!" murmured he; "you, monseigneur, the confessor of the order!"

"Yes, I; but we have nothing to unravel together, seeing that you are not one of the affiliated."

"Monseigneur!"

"And I understand, that not being so, you refuse to comply with its command."

"Monseigneur, I beseech you, condescend to hear me."

"And wherefore?"

"Monseigneur, I do not say that I have nothing to do with the society."

"Ah! ah!"

"I say not that I refuse to obey."

"Nevertheless, M. de Baisemeaux, what has passed wears very much the air of resistance."

"Oh, no! monseigneur, no; I only wished to be certain."

"To be certain of what?" said Aramis, in a tone of supreme contempt.

"Of nothing at all, monseigneur." Baisemeaux lowered his voice, and bending before the prelate said, "I am at

all times and in all places at the disposal of my superiors, but——"

"Very good. I like you better thus, monsieur," said Aramis, as he resumed his seat, and put out his glass to Baisemeaux, whose hand trembled so that he could not fill it. "You were saying 'but'——" continued Aramis.

"But," replied the unhappy man, "having received no notice, I was very far from expecting."

"Does not the Gospel say, 'Watch, for the moment is known only of God.' Do not the rules of the order say, 'Watch, for that which I will, you ought always to will also.' And what pretext will serve you now that you did not expect the confessor, M. de Baisemeaux?"

"Because, monseigneur, there is at present in the Bastile no prisoner ill."

Aramis shrugged his shoulders. "What do you know about that?" said he.

"But, nevertheless, it appears to me——"

"M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, turning round in his chair, "here is your servant, who wishes to speak with you;" and at this moment, De Baisemeaux's servant appeared at the threshold of the door."

"What is it?" asked Baisemeaux, sharply.

"Monsieur," said the man, "they are bringing you the doctor's return."

Aramis looked at De Baisemeaux with a calm and confident eye.

"Well," said he, "let the messenger enter."

The messenger entered, saluted, and handed in the report. Baisemeaux ran his eye over it, and raising his head, said in surprise, "No. 12 is ill!"

"How was it, then," said Aramis, carelessly, "that you told me everybody was well in your hôtel, M. de Baisemeaux?" And he emptied his glass without removing his eyes from Baisemeaux.

The governor then made a sign to the messenger, and when he had quitted the room said, still trembling, "I think that there is in the article, 'on the prisoner's demand.'"

"Yes, it is so," answered Aramis. "But, see what it is they want with you now."

And that moment a sergeant put his head in at the door. "What do you want now?" cried Baisemeaux. "Can you not leave me in peace for ten minutes?"

"Monsieur," said the sergeant, "the sick man, No. 12, has commissioned the turnkey to request you to send him a confessor."

Baisemeaux very nearly sank on the floor; but Aramis disdained to reassure him, just as he had disdained to terrify him. "What must I answer?" inquired Baisemeaux.

"Just what you please," replied Aramis, compressing his lips; "that is your business. *I* am not the governor of the Bastile."

"Tell the prisoner," cried Baisemeaux, quickly,—"tell the prisoner that his request is granted." The sergeant left the room. "Oh! monseigneur, monseigneur," murmured Baisemeaux, "how could I have suspected!—how could I have foreseen this!"

"Who requested you to suspect, and who besought you to foresee?" contemptuously answered Aramis. "The order suspects; the order knows; the order foresees—is not that enough?"

"What is it you command?" added Baisemeaux.

"I?—nothing at all. I am nothing but a poor priest, a simple confessor. Have I your orders to go and see the sufferer?"

"O monseigneur, I do not order; I pray you to go."

"'Tis well; conduct me to him."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE PRISONER.

Since Aramis's singular transformation into a confessor of the order, Baisemeaux was no longer the same man. Up to that period, the place which Aramis had held in the worthy governor's estimation, was that of a prelate whom he respected and a friend to whom he owed a debt of gratitude; but now he felt himself an inferior, and that Aramis was his master. He himself lighted a lantern, summoned a turnkey, and said, returning to Aramis, "I am at your orders, monseigneur." Aramis merely nodded his head, as much as to say, "Very good;" and signed to him with his hand to lead the way. Baisemeaux advanced, and Aramis followed him. It was a calm and lovely starlit night; the steps of three men resounded on the flags of the terraces, and the clinking of the keys hanging from the jailer's girdle made itself heard up to the stories of the towers, as if to remind the prisoners that the liberty of earth was a luxury beyond their reach. It might have been said, that the alteration effected in Baisemeaux extended even to the prisoners. The turnkey, the same who on Aramis's first arrival had shown himself so inquisitive and curious, was now not only silent, but impassible. He held his head down, and seemed afraid to keep his ears open. In this wise they reached the basement of the Bertaudière, the two first stories of which were mounted silently and somewhat slowly; for Baisemeaux, though far from disobeying, was far from exhibiting any eagerness

to obey. On arriving at the door, Baisemeaux showed a disposition to enter the prisoner's chamber; but Aramis stopping him on the threshold said, "The rules do not allow the governor to hear the prisoner's confession."

Baisemeaux bowed, and made way for Aramis, who took the lantern and entered; and then signed to them to close the door behind him. For an instant he remained standing listening whether Baisemeaux and the turnkey had retired; but as soon as he was assured by the sound of their descending footsteps that they had left the tower, he put the lantern on the table and gazed around. On a bed of green serge, similar in all respects to the other beds in the Bastile, save that it was newer, and under curtains half-drawn, reposed a young man, to whom we have already once before introduced Aramis. According to custom, the prisoner was without a light. At the hour of curfew, he was bound to extinguish his lamp, and we perceive how much he was favored, in being allowed to keep it burning, even till then. Near the bed a large leathern arm-chair, with twisted legs, sustained his clothes. A little table—without pens, books, paper, or ink—stood neglected in sadness near the window; while several plates, still unemptied, showed that the prisoner had scarcely touched his evening meal. Aramis saw that the young man was stretched upon his bed, his face half concealed by his arms. The arrival of a visitor did not cause any change of position; either he was waiting in expectation, or was asleep. Aramis lighted the candle from the lantern, pushed back the arm-chair, and approached the bed with an evident mixture of interest and respect. The young man raised his head. "What is it?" said he.

"You desired a confessor?" replied Aramis.

"Yes."

"Because you were ill?"

"Yes."

"Very ill?"

The young man gave Aramis a piercing glance, and answered, "I thank you." After a moment's silence, "I have seen you before," he continued. Aramis bowed.

Doubtless, the scrutiny the prisoner had just made of the cold, crafty, and imperious character stamped upon the features of the bishop of Vannes, was little reassuring to one in his situation, for he added, "I am better."

"And so?" said Aramis.

"Why then—being better, I have no longer the same need of a confessor, I think."

"Not even of the hair-cloth, which the note you found in your bread informed you of?"

The young man started; but before he had either assented or denied, Aramis continued, "Not even of the ecclesiastic from whom you were to hear an important revelation?"

"If it be so," said the young man, sinking again on his pillow, "it is different; I am listening."

Aramis then looked at him more closely, and was struck with the easy majesty of his mien, one which can never be acquired unless Heaven has implanted it in the blood or heart. "Sit down, monsieur," said the prisoner.

Aramis bowed and obeyed. "How does the Bastile agree with you?" asked the bishop.

"Very well."

"You do not suffer?"

"No."

"You have nothing to regret?"

"Nothing."

"Not even your liberty?"

"What do you call liberty, monsieur?" asked the prisoner, with the tone of a man who is preparing for a struggle.

"I call liberty, the flowers, the air, light, the stars, the

happiness of going whithersoever the sinewy limbs of one-and-twenty chance to wish to carry you."

The young man smiled, whether in resignation or contempt, it was difficult to tell. "Look," said he, "I have in that Japanese vase two roses gathered yesterday evening in the bud from the governor's garden; this morning they have blown and spread their vermilion chalice beneath my gaze; with every opening petal they unfold the treasures of their perfumes, filling my chamber with a fragrance that embalms it. Look now on these two roses; even among roses these are beautiful, and the rose is the most beautiful of flowers. Why, then, do you bid me desire other flowers when I possess the loveliest of all?"

Aramis gazed at the young man in surprise.

"If *flowers* constitute liberty," sadly resumed the captive, "I am free, for I possess them."

"But the air!" cried Aramis; "air is so necessary to life!"

"Well, monsieur," returned the prisoner; "draw near to the window; it is open. Between high heaven and earth the wind whirls on its waftages of hail and lightning, exhales its torrid mist or breathes in gentle breezes. It caresses my face. When mounted on the back of this arm-chair, with my arm around the bars of the window to sustain myself, I fancy I am swimming the wide expanse before me." The countenance of Aramis darkened as the young man continued: "Light I have! what is better than light? I have the sun, a friend who comes to visit me every day without the permission of the governor or the jailer's company. He comes in at the window and traces in my room a square the shape of the window, which lights up the hangings of my bed and floods the very floor. This luminous square increases from ten o'clock till midday, and decreases from one till three slowly, as if, having hastened to my presence it sorrowed at bidding me fare-

well. When its last ray disappears I have enjoyed its presence for four hours. Is not that sufficient? I have been told that there are unhappy beings who dig in quarries, and laborers who toil in mines, who never behold it at all." Aramis wiped the drops from his brow. "As to the stars which are so delightful to view," continued the young man, "they all resemble each other save in size and brilliancy. I am a favored mortal, for if you had not lighted that candle you would have been able to see the beautiful stars which I was gazing at from my couch before your arrival, whose silvery rays were stealing through my brain."

Aramis lowered his head; he felt himself overwhelmed with the bitter flow of that sinister philosophy which is the religion of the captive.

"So much, then, for the flowers, the air, the daylight, and the stars," tranquilly continued the young man; "there remains but exercise. Do I not walk all day in the governor's garden if it is fine—here if it rains? in the fresh air if it is warm; in perfect warmth, thanks to my winter stove, if it be cold? Ah! monsieur, do you fancy," continued the prisoner, not without bitterness, "that men have not done everything for me that a man can hope for or desire?"

"Men!" said Aramis; "be it so; but it seems to me you are forgetting Heaven."

"Indeed I have forgotten Heaven," murmured the prisoner, with emotion; "but why do you mention it? Of what use is it to talk to a prisoner of Heaven?"

Aramis looked steadily at this singular youth, who possessed the resignation of a martyr with the smile of an atheist. "Is not Heaven in everything?" he murmured in a reproachful tone.

"Say rather, at the end of everything," answered the prisoner, firmly.

"Be it so," said Aramis; "but let us return to our starting-point."

"I ask nothing better," returned the young man.

"I am your confessor."

"Yes."

"Well, then, you ought, as a penitent, to tell me the truth."

"My whole desire is to tell it you."

"Every prisoner has committed some crime for which he has been imprisoned. What crime, then, have *you* committed?"

"You asked me the same question the first time you saw me," returned the prisoner.

"And then, as now, you evaded giving me an answer."

"And what reason have you for thinking that I shall now reply to you?"

"Because this time I am your confessor."

"Then, if you wish me to tell what crime I have committed explain to me in what a crime consists. For as my conscience does not accuse me, I aver that I am not a criminal."

"We are often criminals in the sight of the great of the earth, not alone for having ourselves committed crimes, but because we know that crimes have been committed."

The prisoner manifested the deepest attention.

"Yes, I understand y u," he said, after a pause; "yes, you are right, monsieur; it is very possible that, in such a light I am a criminal in the eyes of the great of the earth."

"Ah! then you know something," said Aramis, who thought he had pierced not merely through a defect in the harness, but through the joints of it.

"No, I am not aware of anything," replied the young man; "but sometimes I think—and I say to myself——"

"What do you say to yourself?"

"That if I were to think but a little more deeply I should either go mad or I should divine a great deal."

"And then—and then?" said Aramis, impatiently.

"Then I leave off."

"You leave off?"

"Yes; my head becomes confused and my ideas melancholy; I feel *ennui* overtaking me; I wish——"

"What?"

"I don't know; but I do not like to give myself up to longing for things which I do not possess, when I am so happy with what I have."

"You are afraid of death?" said Aramis, with a slight uneasiness.

"Yes," said the young man, smiling.

Aramis felt the chill of that smile, and shuddered. "O, as you fear death, you know more about matters than you say," he cried.

"And you," returned the prisoner, "who bade me to ask to see you; you, who, when I did ask to see you, came here promising a world of confidence; how is it that, nevertheless, it is you who are silent, leaving it for me to speak. Since, then, we both wear masks, either let us both retain them or put them aside together."

Aramis felt the force and justice of the remark, saying to himself, "This is no ordinary man; I must be cautious. —Are you ambitious?" said he suddenly to the prisoner, aloud, without preparing him for the alteration.

"What do you mean by ambition?" replied the youth.

"Ambition," replied Aramis, "is the feeling which prompts a man to desire more—much more—than he possesses."

"I said that I was contented, monsieur; but, perhaps, I deceive myself. I am ignorant of the nature of ambition; but it is not impossible I may have some. Tell me your mind; that is all I ask."

"An ambitious man," said Aramis, "is one who covets that which is beyond his station."

"I covet nothing beyond my station," said the young man, with an assurance of manner which for the second time made the bishop of Vannes tremble.

He was silent. But to look at the kindling eye, the knitted brow, and the reflective attitude of the captive, it was evident that he expected something more than silence,—a silence which Aramis now broke. "You lied the first time I saw you," said he.

"Lied!" cried the young man, starting up on his couch, with such a tone in his voice, and such a lightning in his eyes, that Aramis recoiled, in spite of himself.

"I *should* say," returned Aramis, bowing, "you concealed from me what you knew of your infancy."

"A man's secrets are his own, monsieur," retorted the prisoner, "and not at the mercy of the first chance-comer."

"True," said Aramis, bowing still lower than before, "'tis true; pardon me, but to-day do I still occupy the place of a chance-comer? I beseech you to reply, monseigneur."

This title slightly disturbed the prisoner; but nevertheless he did not appear astonished that it was given him. "I do not know you, monsieur," said he.

"Oh, if I but dared, I would take your hand and kiss it!"

The young man seemed as if he were going to give Aramis his hand; but the light which beamed in his eyes faded away, and he coldly and distrustfully withdrew his hand again. "Kiss the hand of a prisoner," he said, shaking his head; "to what purpose?"

"Why did you tell me," said Aramis, "that you were happy here? Why, that you aspired to nothing? Why, in a word, by thus speaking, do you prevent me from being frank in my turn?"

The same light shone a third time in the young man's eyes, but died ineffectually away as before.

"You distrust me," said Aramis.

"And why say you so, monsieur?"

"Oh, for a very simple reason; if you know what you ought to know, you ought to mistrust everybody."

"Then do not be astonished that I am mistrustful, since you suspect me of knowing what I do not know."

Aramis was struck with admiration at this energetic resistance. "Oh, monseigneur! you drive me to despair," said he, striking the arm-chair with his fist.

"And, on my part, I do not comprehend you, monsieur."

"Well, then, try to understand me." The prisoner looked fixedly at Aramis.

"Sometimes it seems to me," said the latter, "that I have before me the man whom I seek, and then——"

"And then your man disappears,—is it not so?" said the prisoner, smiling. "So much the better."

Aramis rose. "Certainly," said he; "I have nothing further to say to a man who mistrusts me as you do."

"And I, monsieur," said the prisoner, in the same tone, "have nothing to say to a man who will not understand that a prisoner ought to be mistrustful of everybody."

"Even of his old friends," said Aramis. "Oh, monseigneur, you are *too* prudent!"

"Of my old friends?—you one of my old friends,—you?"

"Do you no longer remember," said Aramis, "that you once saw, in the village where your early years were spent——"

"Do you know the name of the village?" asked the prisoner.

"Noisy-le-Sec, monseigneur," answered Aramis, firmly.

"Go on," said the young man, with an immovable aspect.

"Stay, monseigneur," said Aramis; "if you are positively resolved to carry on this game, let us break off. I am here to tell you many things, 'tis true; but you must allow me to see that on your side, you have a desire to know them. Before revealing the important matters I still withhold, be assured I am in need of some encouragement, if not candor; a little sympathy, if not confidence. But you keep yourself intrenched in a pretended ignorance which paralyzes me. Oh, not for the reason you think; for, ignorant as you may be, or indifferent as you feign to be, you are none the less what you are, monseigneur, and there is nothing—nothing, mark me! which can cause you not to be so."

"I promise you," replied the prisoner, "to hear you without impatience. Only it appears to me that I have a right to repeat the question I have already asked, 'Who *are* you?'"

"Do you remember, fifteen or eighteen years ago, seeing at Noisy-le-Sec a cavalier, accompanied by a lady in black silk, with flame-colored ribbons in her hair?"

"Yes," said the young man; "I once asked the name of this cavalier, and they told me he called himself the Abbé d'Herblay. I was astonished that the abbé had so warlike an air, and they replied that there was nothing singular in that, seeing that he was one of Louis XIII.'s musketeers."

"Well," said Aramis, "that musketeer and abbé, afterwards bishop of Vannes, is your confessor now."

"I know it; I recognized you."

"Then, monseigneur, if you know that, I must further add a fact of which you are ignorant—that if the king were to know this evening of the presence of this musketeer, this abbé, this bishop, this confessor, *here*—he, who

has risked everything to visit you, to-morrow would behold the steely glitter of the executioner's ax in a dungeon more gloomy, more obscure than yours."

While listening to these words, delivered with emphasis, the young man had raised himself on his couch, and was now gazing more and more eagerly at Aramis.

The result of his scrutiny was that he appeared to derive some confidence from it. "Yes," he murmured, "I remember perfectly. The woman of whom you speak came once with you, and twice afterwards with another." He hesitated.

"With another, who came to see you every month—is it not so, monseigneur?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who this lady was?"

The light seemed ready to flash from the prisoner's eyes. "I am aware that she was one of the ladies of the court," he said.

"You remember that lady well, do you not?"

"Oh, my recollection can hardly be very confused on this head," said the young prisoner. "I saw that lady once with a gentleman about forty-five years old. I saw her once with you, and with the lady dressed in black. I have seen her twice since with the same person. These four people, with my master, and old Perronnette, my jailer, and the governor of the prison, are the only persons with whom I have ever spoken, and indeed, almost the only persons I have ever seen."

"Then you were in prison?"

"If I am a prisoner here, there I was comparatively free, although in a very narrow sense—a house I never quitted, a garden surrounded with walls I could not climb, these constituted my residence, but you know it, as you have been there. In a word, being accustomed to live within these bounds, I never cared to leave them. And so you

will understand, monsieur, that having never seen anything of the world, I have nothing left to care for; and therefore, if you relate anything, you will be obliged to explain each item to me as you go along."

"And I will do so," said Aramis, bowing; "for it is my duty, monseigneur."

"Well, then, begin by telling me who was my tutor."

"A worthy and, above all, an honorable gentleman, monseigneur; fit guide both for body and soul. Had you ever any reason to complain of him?"

"Oh, no; quite the contrary. But this gentleman of yours often used to tell me that my father and mother were dead. Did he deceive me, or did he speak the truth?"

"He was compelled to comply with the orders given him."

"Then he lied?"

"In one respect. Your father is dead."

"And my mother?"

"She is dead *for you*."

"But then she lives for others, does she not?"

"Yes."

"And I—and I, then" (the young man looked sharply at Aramis) "am compelled to live in the obscurity of a prison?"

"Alas! I fear so."

"And that because my presence in the world would lead to the revelation of a great secret?"

"Certainly, a very great secret."

"My enemy must indeed be powerful, to be able to shut up in the Bastile a child such as I then was."

"He is."

"More powerful than my mother, then?"

"And why do you ask that?"

"Because my mother would have taken my part."

Aramis hesitated. "Yes, monseigneur; more powerful than your mother."

"Seeing, then, that my nurse and preceptor were carried off, and that I, also, was separated from them—either they were, or I am, very dangerous to my enemy?"

"Yes; but you are alluding to a peril from which he freed himself, by causing the nurse and preceptor to disappear," answered Aramis, quietly.

"Disappear!" cried the prisoner—"how did they disappear?"

"In a very sure way," answered Aramis—"they are dead."

The young man turned pale, and passed his hand tremblingly over his face. "Poison?" he asked.

"Poison."

The prisoner reflected a moment. "My enemy must indeed have been very cruel, or hard beset by necessity, to assassinate those two innocent people, my sole support; for the worthy gentleman and the poor nurse had never harmed a living being."

"In your family, monseigneur, necessity is stern. And so it is necessity which compels me, to my great regret, to tell you that this gentleman and the unhappy lady have been assassinated."

"Oh, you tell me nothing I am not aware of," said the prisoner, knitting his brows.

"How?"

"I suspected it."

"Why?"

"I will tell you."

At this moment the young man, supporting himself on his two elbows, drew close to Aramis's face, with such an expression of dignity, of self-command, and of defiance even, that the bishop felt the electricity of enthusiasm strike in devouring flashes from that great heart of his, into his brain of adamant.

"Speak, monseigneur. I have already told you that by

conversing with you I endanger my life. Little value as it has, I implore you to accept it as the ransom of your own."

"Well," resumed the young man, "this is why I suspected they had killed my nurse and my preceptor——"

"Whom you used to call your father."

"Yes; whom I called my father, but whose son I well knew I was not."

"Who caused you to suppose so?"

"Just as you, monsieur, are too respectful for a friend, he was also too respectful for a father."

"I, however," said Aramis, "have no intention to disguise myself."

The young man nodded assent, and continued:—"Undoubtedly, I was not destined to perpetual seclusion," said the prisoner; "and that which makes me believe so, above all, now, is the care that was taken to render me as accomplished a cavalier as possible. The gentleman attached to my person taught me everything he knew himself—mathematics, a little geometry, astronomy, fencing and riding. Every morning I went through military exercises, and practiced on horseback. Well, one morning during summer, it being very hot, I went to sleep in the hall. Nothing up to that period, except the respect paid me, had enlightened me, or even roused my suspicions. I lived as children, as birds, as plants, as the air and the sun do. I had just turned my fifteenth year——"

"This, then, is eight years ago?"

"Yes, nearly; but I have ceased to reckon time."

"Excuse me; but what did your tutor tell you, to encourage you to work?"

"He used to say, that a man was bound to make for himself, in the world, that fortune which Heaven had refused him at his birth. He added, that, being a poor, obscure orphan, I had no one but myself to look to; and

that nobody either did, or ever would, take any interest in me. I was then in the hall I have spoken of, asleep from fatigue with long fencing. My preceptor was in his room on the first floor, just over me. Suddenly I heard him exclaim, and then he called: 'Perronnette! Perronnette!' It was my nurse whom he called."

"Yes, I know it," said Aramis. "Continue, monseigneur."

"Very likely she was in the garden; for my preceptor came hastily downstairs. I rose, anxious at seeing him anxious. He opened the garden-door, still crying out, 'Perronnette! Perronnette!' The windows of the hall looked into the court; the shutters were closed; but through a chink in them I saw my tutor draw near a large well, which was almost directly under the windows of his study. He stooped over the brim, looked into the well, and again cried out, and made wild and affrighted gestures. Where I was, I could not only see, but hear—and see and hear I did."

"Go on, I pray you," said Aramis.

"Dame Perronnette came running up, hearing the governor's cries. He went to meet her, took her by the arm, and drew her quickly towards the edge; after which, as they both bent over it together, 'Look, look,' cried he, 'what a misfortune!'

"'Calm yourself, calm yourself,' said Perronnette; 'what is the matter?'

"'The letter!' he exclaimed; 'do you see that letter?' pointing to the bottom of the well.

"'What letter?' she cried.

"'The letter you see down there; the last letter from the queen.'

"At this word I trembled. My tutor—he who passed for my father, he who was continually recommending me modesty and humility—in correspondence with the queen!

"'The queen's last letter!' cried Perronnette, without showing more astonishment than at seeing this letter at the bottom of the well; 'but how came it there?'

"'A chance, Dame Perronnette—a singular chance. I was entering my room, and on opening the door, the window, too, being open, a puff of air came suddenly and carried off this paper—this letter of her majesty's; I darted after it, and gained the window just in time to see it flutter a moment in the breeze and disappear down the well.'

"'Well,' said Dame Perronnette; 'and if the letter has fallen into the well, 'tis all the same as if it was burnt; and as the queen burns all her letters every time she comes——'

"And so you see this lady who came every month was the queen," said the prisoner.

"'Doubtless, doubtless,' continued the old gentleman; 'but this letter contained instructions—how can I follow them?'

"'Write immediately to her; give her a plain account of the accident, and the queen will no doubt write you another letter in place of this.'

"'Oh! the queen would never believe the story,' said the good gentleman, shaking his head; she will imagine that I want to keep this letter instead of giving it up like the rest, so as to have a hold over her. She is so distrustful, and M. de Mazarin so—— Yon devil of an Italian is capable of having us poisoned at the first breath of suspicion.'"

Aramis almost imperceptibly smiled.

"'You know, Dame Perronnette, they are both so suspicious in all that concerns Philippe.'

"Philippe was the name they gave me," said the prisoner.

"'Well, 'tis no use hesitating,' said Dame Perronnette, 'somebody must go down the well.'

"'Of course; so that the person who goes down may read the paper as he is coming up.'

"'But let us choose some villager who cannot read, and then you will be at ease.'

"'Granted; but will not any one who descends guess that a paper must be important for which we risk a man's life? However, you have given me an idea, Dame Perronnette; somebody shall go down the well, but that somebody shall be myself.'

"But at this notion Dame Perronnette lamented and cried in such a manner, and so implored the old nobleman, with tears in her eyes, that he promised her to obtain a ladder long enough to reach down, while she went in search of some stout-hearted youth, whom she was to persuade that a jewel had fallen into the well, and that this jewel was wrapped in a paper. 'And as paper,' remarked my preceptor, 'naturally unfolds in water, the young man would not be surprised at finding nothing, after all, but the letter wide open.'

"'But perhaps the writing will be already effaced by that time,' said Dame Perronnette.

"'No consequence, provided we secure the letter. On returning it to the queen, she will see at once that we have not betrayed her; and consequently, as we shall not rouse the distrust of Mazarin, we shall have nothing to fear from him.'

"Having come to this resolution, they parted. I pushed back the shutter, and, seeing that my tutor was about to re-enter, I threw myself on my couch, in a confusion of brain caused by all I had just heard. My governor opened the door a few moments after, and thinking I was asleep gently closed it again. As soon as ever it was shut, I rose, and, listening, heard the sound of retiring footsteps. Then I returned to the shutters, and saw my tutor and Dame Perronnette go out together. I was alone in the

house. They had hardly closed the gate before I sprang from the window and ran to the well. Then just as my governor had leaned over, so leaned I. Something white and luminous glistened in the green and quivering silence of the water. The brilliant disk fascinated and allured me; my eyes became fixed, and I could hardly breathe. The well seemed to draw me downwards with its slimy mouth and icy breath; and I thought I read, at the bottom of the water, characters of fire traced upon the letter the queen had touched. Then, scarcely knowing what I was about, and urged on by one of those instinctive impulses which drive men to destruction, I lowered the cord from the windlass of the well to within about three feet of the water leaving the bucket dangling, at the same time taking infinite pains not to disturb that coveted letter, which was beginning to change its white tint for the hue of chrysoprase—proof enough that it was sinking,—and then, with the rope weltering in my hands, slid down into the abyss. When I saw myself hanging over the dark pool, when I saw the sky lessening above my head, a cold shudder came over me, a chill fear got the better of me, I was seized with giddiness, and the hair rose on my head; but my strong will still reigned supreme over all the terror and disquietude. I gained the water, and at once plunged into it, holding on by one hand, while I immersed the other and seized the dear letter, which, alas! came in two in my grasp. I concealed the two fragments in my body-coat, and, helping myself with my feet against the sides of the pit, and clinging on with my hands, agile and vigorous as I was, and, above all, pressed for time, I regained the brink, drenching it as I touched it with the water that streamed off me. I was no sooner out of the well with my prize, than I rushed into the sunlight, and took refuge in a kind of shrubbery at the bottom of the garden. As I entered my hiding-place, the bell which re-

sounded when the great gate was opened, rang. It was my preceptor come back again. I had but just time. I calculated that it would take ten minutes before he would gain my place of concealment, even if, guessing where I was, he came straight to it; and twenty if he were obliged to look for me. But this was time enough to allow me to read the cherished letter, whose fragments I hastened to unite again. The writing was already fading, but I managed to decipher it all."

"And will you tell me what you read therein, monseigneur?" asked Aramis, deeply interested.

"Quite enough, monsieur, to see that my tutor was a man of noble rank, and that Perronnette, without being a lady of quality, was far better than a servant; and also to perceive that I must myself be high-born, since the queen, Anne of Austria, and Mazarin, the prime minister, commended me so earnestly to their care." Here the young man paused, quite overcome.

"And what happened?" asked Aramis.

"It happened, monsieur," answered he, "that the workmen they had summoned found nothing in the well, after the closest search; that my governor perceived that the brink was all watery; that I was not so dried by the sun as to prevent Dame Perronnette spying that my garments were moist; and, lastly, that I was seized with a violent fever, owing to the chill and the excitement of my discovery, an attack of delirium supervening, during which I related the whole adventure; so that, guided by my avowal, my governor found the pieces of the queen's letter inside the bolster where I had concealed them."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "now I understand."

"Beyond this, all is conjecture. Doubtless the unfortunate lady and gentleman, not daring to keep the occurrence secret, wrote of all this to the queen and sent back the torn letter."

"After which," said Aramis, "you were arrested and removed to the Bastile."

"As you see."

"Your two attendants disappeared?"

"Alas!"

"Let us not take up our time with the dead, but see what can be done with the living. You told me you were resigned."

"I repeat it."

"Without any desire for freedom?"

"As I told you."

"Without ambition, sorrow, or thought?"

The young man made no answer.

"Well," asked Aramis, "why are you silent?"

"I think I have spoken enough," answered the prisoner; "and that now it is your turn. I am weary."

Aramis gathered himself up, and a shade of deep solemnity spread itself over his countenance. It was evident that he had reached the crisis in the part he had come to the prison to play. "One question," said Aramis.

"What is it? speak."

"In the house you inhabited there were neither looking-glasses nor mirrors?"

"What are those two words, and what is their meaning?" asked the young man; "I have no sort of knowledge of them."

"They designate two pieces of furniture which reflect objects; so that, for instance, you may see in them your own lineaments, as you see mine now, with the naked eye."

"No; then there was neither a glass nor a mirror in the house," answered the young man.

Aramis looked round him. "Nor is there anything of the kind here either," he said; "they have again taken the same precaution."

"To what end?"

"You will know directly. Now, you have told me that you were instructed in mathematics, astronomy, fencing, and riding; but you have not said a word about history."

"My tutor sometimes related to me the principal deeds of the King St. Louis, King Francis I., and king Henry IV."

"Is that all?"

"Very nearly."

"This also was done by design, then; just as they deprived you of mirrors, which reflect the present, so they left you in ignorance of history, which reflects the past. Since your imprisonment, books have been forbidden you; so that you are unacquainted with a number of facts, by means of which you would be able to reconstruct the shattered mansion of your recollections and your hopes."

"It is true," said the young man.

"Listen, then; I will in a few words tell you what has passed in France during the last twenty-three or twenty-four years; that is, from the probable date of your birth; in a word, from the time that interests you."

"Say on." And the young man resumed his serious and attentive attitude.

"Do you know who was the son of Henry IV.?"

"At least I know who his successor was."

"How?"

"By means of a coin dated 1610, which bears the effigy of Henry IV.; and another of 1612, bearing that of Louis XIII. So I presumed that, there being only two years between the two dates, Louis was Henry's successor."

"Then," said Aramis, "you know that the last reigning monarch was Louis XIII?"

"I do," answered the youth slightly reddening.

"Well, he was a prince full of noble ideas and great projects, always, alas! deferred by the trouble of the times

and the dread struggle that his minister Richelieu had to maintain against the great nobles of France. The king himself was of a feeble character; and died young and unhappy."

"I know it."

"He had been long anxious about having an heir; a care which weighs heavily on princes, who desire to leave behind them more than one pledge that their best thoughts and works will be continued."

"Did the king, then, die childless?" asked the prisoner, smiling.

"No, but he was long without one, and for a long while thought he should be the last of his race. This idea had reduced him to the depths of despair, when suddenly, his wife, Anne of Austria——"

The prisoner trembled.

"Did you know," said Aramis, "that Louis XIII.'s wife was called Anne of Austria?"

"Continue," said the young man, without replying to the question.

"When suddenly," resumed Aramis, "the queen announced an interesting event. There was great joy at the intelligence, and all prayed for her happy delivery. On the 5th of September, 1638, she gave birth to a son."

Here Aramis looked at his companion, and thought he observed him turning pale. "You are about to hear," said Aramis, "an account which few indeed could now avouch; for it refers to a secret which they imagined buried with the dead, entombed in the abyss of the confessional."

"And you will tell me this secret," broke in the youth.

"Oh!" said Aramis, with unmistakable emphasis, "I do not know that I ought to risk this secret by intrusting it to one who has no desire to quit the Bastile."

"I hear you, monsieur."

"The queen, then, gave birth to a son. But while the

court was rejoicing over the event, when the king had shown the new-born child to the nobility and people, and was sitting gayly down to table, to celebrate the event, the queen, who was alone in her room, was again taken ill and gave birth to a second son."

"Oh!" said the prisoner, betraying a better acquaintance with affairs than he had owned to, "I thought that Monsieur was only born in——"

Aramis raised his finger; "Permit me to continue," he said.

The prisoner sighed impatiently, and paused.

"Yes," said Aramis, "the queen had a second son, whom Dame Perronnette, the midwife, received in her arms."

"Dame Perronnette!" murmured the young man.

"They ran at once to the banqueting-room, and whispered to the king what had happened; he rose and quitted the table. But this time it was no longer happiness that his face expressed, but something akin to terror. The birth of twins changed into bitterness the joy to which that of an only son had given rise, seeing that in France (a fact you are assuredly ignorant of) it is the oldest of the king's sons who succeeds his father."

"I know it."

"And that the doctors and jurists assert that there is ground for doubting whether the son that first makes his appearance is the elder by the law of heaven and of nature."

The prisoner uttered a smothered cry, and became whiter than the coverlet under which he hid himself.

"Now you understand," pursued Aramis, "that the king, who, with so much pleasure, saw himself repeated in one, was in despair about two; fearing that the second might dispute the first's claim to seniority, which had been recognized only two hours before; and so this second son,

relying on party interests and caprices, might one day sow discord and engender civil war throughout the kingdom; by these means destroying the very dynasty he should have strengthened."

"Oh, I understand!—I understand?" murmured the young man.

"Well," continued Aramis; "this is what they relate, what they declare; this is why one of the queen's two sons, shamefully parted from his brother, shamefully sequestered, is buried in profound obscurity; this is why that second son has disappeared, and so completely, that not a soul in France, save his mother, is aware of his existence."

"Yes! his mother, who has cast him off," cried the prisoner in a tone of despair.

"Except, also," Aramis went on, "the lady in the black dress; and, finally, excepting——"

"Excepting yourself.—Is it not? You who come and relate all this; you, who rouse in my soul curiosity, hatred, ambition, and, perhaps, even the thirst of vengeance; except you, monsieur, who, if you are the man whom I expect, whom the note I have received applies to, whom, in short, Heaven ought to send me, must possess about you——"

"What?" asked Aramis.

"A portrait of the king, Louis XIV., who at this moment reigns upon the throne of France."

"Here is the portrait," replied the bishop, handing the prisoner a miniature in enamel, on which Louis was depicted life-like, with a handsome, lofty mien. The prisoner eagerly seized the portrait, and gazed at it with devouring eyes.

"And now, monseigneur," said Aramis, "here is a mirror." Aramis left the prisoner time to recover his ideas.

"So high!—so high!" murmured the young man, eagerly comparing the likeness of Louis with his own countenance reflected in the glass.

"What do you think of it?" at length said Aramis.

"I think that I am lost," replied the captive; "the king will never set me free."

"And I—I demand to know," added the bishop, fixing his piercing eyes significantly upon the prisoner, "I demand to know which of these two is king; the one this miniature portrays, or whom the glass reflects?"

"The king, monsieur," sadly replied the young man, "is he who is on the throne, who is not in prison; and who, on the other hand, can cause others to be entombed there. Royalty means power; and you behold how powerless I am."

"Monseigneur," answered Aramis, with a respect he had not yet manifested, "the king, mark me, will, if you desire it, be the one that, quitting his dungeon, shall maintain himself upon the throne, on which his friends will place him."

"Tempt me not, monsieur," broke in the prisoner bitterly.

"Be not weak, monseigneur," persisted Aramis; "I have brought all the proofs of your birth; consult them; satisfy yourself that you are a king's son; it is for *us* to act."

"No, no; it is impossible."

"Unless, indeed," resumed the bishop ironically, "it be the destiny of your race, that the brothers excluded from the throne should be always princes void of courage and honesty, as was your uncle, M. Gaston d'Orléans, who ten times conspired against his brother Louis XIII."

"What!" cried the prince astonished, "my uncle Gaston 'conspired against his brother;' conspired to dethrone him?"

"Exactly, monseigneur; for no other reason. I tell you the truth."

"And he had friends—devoted friends?"

"As much so as I am to you."

"And, after all, what did he do?—Failed!"

"He failed, I admit; but always through his own fault; and, for the sake of purchasing—not his life—for the life of the king's brother is sacred and inviolable—but his liberty, he sacrificed the lives of all his friends, one after another. And so, at this day, he is a very blot on history, the detestation of a hundred noble families in this kingdom."

"I understand, monsieur; either by weakness or treachery, my uncle slew his friends."

"By weakness; which, in princes, is always treachery."

"And cannot a man fail then, from incapacity and ignorance? Do you really believe it possible that a poor captive such as I, brought up, not only at a distance from the court, but even from the world—do you believe it possible that such a one could assist those of his friends who should attempt to serve him?" And as Aramis was about to reply, the young man suddenly cried out, with a violence which betrayed the temper of his blood, "We are speaking of friends; but how can *I* have any friends—I, whom no one knows; and have neither liberty, money, nor influence, to gain any?"

"I fancy I had the honor to offer myself to your royal highness."

"Oh, do not style me so, monsieur; 'tis either treachery or cruelty. Bid me not think of aught beyond these prison-walls, which so grimly confine me; let me again love, or, at least, submit to my slavery and my obscurity."

"Monseigneur, monseigneur; if you again utter these desperate words—if, after having received proof of your high birth, you still remain poor-spirited in body and

soul, I will comply with your desire, I will depart, and renounce forever the service of a master, to whom so eagerly I came to devote my assistance and my life!"

"Monsieur," cried the prince, "would it not have been better for you to have reflected, before telling me all that you have done, that you have broken my heart forever!"

"And so I desire to do, monseigneur."

"To talk to me about power, grandeur, aye, and to prate of thrones! Is a prison the fit place? You wish to make me believe in splendor, and we are lying lost in night; you boast of glory, and we are smothering our words in the curtains of this miserable bed; you give me glimpses of power absolute whilst I hear the footsteps of the ever-watchful jailer in the corridor—that step which after all, makes you tremble more than it does me. To render me somewhat less incredulous, free me from the Bastile; let me breathe the fresh air; give me my spurs and trusty sword, then we shall begin to understand each other."

"It is precisely my intention to give you all this, monseigneur, and more; only, do you desire it?"

"A word more," said the prince. "I know there are guards in every gallery, bolts to every door, cannon and soldiery at every barrier. How will you overcome the sentries—spike the guns? How will you break through the bolts and bars?"

"Monseigneur,—how did you get the note which announced my arrival to you?"

"You can bribe a jailer for such a thing as a note."

"If we can corrupt one turnkey, we can corrupt ten."

"Well; I admit that it may be possible to release a poor captive from the Bastile; possible so to conceal him that the king's people shall not again ensnare him; possible, in some unknown retreat, to sustain the unhappy wretch in some suitable manner."

"Monseigneur!" said Aramis, smiling.

"I admit that, whoever would do thus much for me, would seem more than mortal in my eyes; but as you tell me I am a prince, brother of a king, how can you restore me the rank and power which my mother and my brother have deprived me of? And as, to effect this, I must pass a life of war and hatred, how can you cause me to prevail in those combats—render me invulnerable by my enemies? Ah! monsieur, reflect on all this; place me, to-morrow, in some dark cavern at a mountain's base; yield me the delight of hearing in freedom sounds of river, plain and valley, of beholding in freedom the sun of the blue heavens, or the stormy sky, and it is enough. Promise me no more than this, for, indeed, more you cannot give, and it would be a crime to deceive me, since you call yourself my friend."

Aramis waited in silence. "Monseigneur," he resumed, after a moment's reflection, "I admire the firm, sound sense which dictates your words; I am happy to have discovered my monarch's mind."

"Again, again! oh God! for mercy's sake," cried the prince, pressing his icy hands upon his clammy brow, "do not play with me! I have no need to be a king to be the happiest of men."

"But I, monseigneur, wish you to be a king for the good of humanity."

"Ah!" said the prince, with fresh distrust inspired by the word; "ah! with what, then, has humanity to reproach my brother?"

"I forgot to say, monseigneur, that if you would allow me to guide you, and if you consent to become the most powerful monarch in Christendom, you will have promoted the interests of all the friends whom I devote to the success of your cause, and these friends are numerous."

"Numerous?"

"Less numerous than powerful, monseigneur."

"Explain yourself."

"It is impossible; I will explain, I swear before Heaven, on that day that I see you sitting on the throne of France."

"But my brother?"

"You shall decree his fate. Do you pity him?"

"Him, who leaves me to perish in a dungeon? No, no For him I have no pity!"

"So much the better."

"He might have himself come to this prison, have taken me by the hand and have said, 'My brother, Heaven created us to love, not to contend with one another. I come to you. A barbarous prejudice has condemned you to pass your days in obscurity, far from mankind, deprived of every joy. I will make you sit down beside me; I will buckle round your waist our father's sword. Will you take advantage of this reconciliation to put down or to restrain me? Will you employ that sword to spill my blood?' 'Oh! never,' I would have replied to him, 'I look on you as my preserver, I will respect you as my master. You give me far more than Heaven bestowed; for through you I possess liberty and the privilege of loving and being loved in this world.'"

"And you would have kept your word, monseigneur?"

"On my life! While now—now that I have guilty ones to punish."

"In what manner, monseigneur?"

"What do you say as to the resemblance that Heaven has given me to my brother?"

"I say that there was in that likeness a providential instruction which the king ought to have heeded; I say that your mother committed a crime in rendering those different in happiness and fortune whom nature created so

startlingly alike, of her own flesh, and I conclude that the object of punishment should be only to restore the equilibrium."

"By which you mean——"

"That if I restore you to your place on your brother's throne, he shall take yours in prison."

"Alas! there's such infinity of suffering in prison, especially it would be so for one who has drunk so deeply of the cup of enjoyment."

"Your royal highness will always be free to act as you may desire; and if it seems good to you, after punishment, you will have it in your power to pardon."

"Good. And now, are you aware of one thing, monsieur?"

"Tell me, my prince."

"It is that I will hear nothing further from you till I am clear of the Bastile."

"I was going to say to your highness that I should only have the pleasure of seeing you once again."

"And then?"

"The day when my prince leaves these gloomy walls."

"Heavens! how will you give me notice of it?"

"By myself coming to fetch you."

"Yourself?"

"My prince, do not leave this chamber save with me, or if in my absence you are compelled to do so, remember that I am not concerned in it."

"And so, I am not to speak a word of this to any one whatever, save to you?"

"Save only to me." Aramis bowed very low. The prince offered his hand.

"Monsieur," he said, in a tone that issued from his heart, "one word more, my last. If you have sought me for my destruction; if you are only a tool in the hands of my enemies; if from our conference, in which you have

sounded the depths of my mind, anything worse than captivity result, that is to say, if death befall me, still receive my blessing, for you will have ended my troubles and given me repose from the tormenting fever that has preyed on me for eight long weary years."

"Monseigneur, wait the result ere you judge me," said Aramis.

"I say that, in such a case, I bless and forgive you. If, on the other hand, you are come to restore me to that position in the sunshine of fortune and glory to which I was destined by Heaven; if by your means I am enabled to live in the memory of man, and confer luster on my race by deeds of valor, or by solid benefits bestowed upon my people; if, from my present depths of sorrow, aided by your generous hand, I raise myself to the very height of honor, then to you, whom I thank with blessings, to you will I offer half my power and my glory: though you would still be but partly recompensed, and your share must always remain incomplete, since I could not divide with you the happiness received at your hands."

"Monseigneur," replied Aramis, moved by the pallor and excitement of the young man, "the nobleness of your hearts fills me with joy and admiration. It is not you who will have to thank me, but rather the nation whom you will render happy, the posterity whose name you will make glorious. Yes; I shall indeed have bestowed upon you more than life, I shall have given you immortality."

The prince offered his hand to Aramis, who sank upon his knee and kissed it.

"It is the first act of homage paid to our future king," said he. "When I see you again, I shall say, 'Good-day, sire.'"

"Till then," said the young man, pressing his wan and wasted fingers over his heart,—"till then, no more dreams, no more strain on my life—my heart would break! Oh

monsieur, how small is my prison—how low the window—how narrow are the doors! To think that so much pride, splendor, and happiness, should be able to enter in and to remain here!"

"Your royal highness makes me proud," said Aramis, "since you infer it is I who brought all this." And he rapped immediately on the door. The jailer came to open it with Baisemeaux, who, devoured by fear and uneasiness, was beginning, in spite of himself, to listen at the door. Happily, neither of the speakers had forgotten to smother his voice, even in the most passionate outbreaks.

"What a confessor!" said the governor, forcing a laugh; "who would believe that a compulsory recluse, a man as though in the very jaws of death, could have committed crimes so numerous, and so long to tell of?"

Aramis made no reply. He was eager to leave the Bastile, where the secret which overwhelmed him seemed to double the weight of the walls. As soon as they reached Baisemeaux's quarters, "Let us proceed to business, my dear governor," said Aramis.

"Alas!" replied Baisemeaux.

"You have to ask me for my receipt for one hundred and fifty thousand livres," said the bishop.

"And to pay over the first third of the sum," added the poor governor, with a sigh, taking three steps towards his iron strong-box.

"Here is the receipt," said Aramis.

"And here is the money," returned Baisemeaux, with a threefold sigh.

"The order instructed me only to give a receipt; it said nothing about receiving the money," rejoined Aramis. "Adieu, monsieur le gouverneur!"

And he departed, leaving Baisemeaux almost more than stifled with joy and surprise at this regal present so liberally bestowed by the confessor extraordinary to the Bastile.

CHAPTER XLVII.

HOW MOUSTON HAD BECOME FATTER WITHOUT GIVING PORTHOS NOTICE THEREOF, AND OF THE TROUBLES WHICH CONSEQUENTLY BEFELL THAT WORTHY GENTLEMAN.

SINCE the departure of Athos for Blois, Porthos and D'Artagnan were seldom together. One was occupied with harassing duties for the king, the other had been making many purchases of furniture which he intended to forward to his estate, and by aid of which he hoped to establish in his various residences something of the courtly luxury he had witnessed in all its dazzling brightness in his majesty's society. D'Artagnan, ever faithful, one morning during an interval of service thought about Porthos, and being uneasy at not having heard anything of him for a fortnight, directed his steps towards his hotel, and pounced upon him just as he was getting up. The worthy baron had a pensive—nay, more than pensive—melancholy air. He was sitting on his bed, only half-dressed, and with legs dangling over the edge, contemplating a host of garments, which with their fringes, lace, embroidery, and slashes of ill-assorted hues, were strewed all over the floor. Porthos, sad and reflective as La Fontaine's hare, did not observe D'Artagnan's entrance, which was moreover screened at this moment by M. Mouston, whose personal corpulency, quite enough at any time to hide one man from another, was effectually doubled by a scarlet coat which the intendant was holding up for his master's inspection, by the sleeves, that he might the better see it all over. D'Artagnan stopped at the thresh-

old and looked in at the pensive Porthos and then, as the sight of the innumerable garments strewing the floor caused mighty sighs to heave the bosom of that excellent gentleman, D'Artagnan thought it time to put an end to these dismal reflections, and coughed by way of announcing himself.

"Ah!" exclaimed Porthos, whose countenance brightened with joy; "ah! ah! Here is D'Artagnan. I shall then get hold of an idea!"

At these words Mouston, doubting what was going on behind him, got out of the way, smiling kindly at the friend of his master, who thus found himself freed from the material obstacle which had prevented his reaching D'Artagnan. Porthos made his sturdy knees crack again in rising, and crossing the room in two strides, found himself face to face with his friend, whom he folded to his breast with a force of affection that seemed to increase with every day. "Ah!" he repeated, "you are always welcome, dear friend; but just now you are more welcome than ever."

"But you seem to have the megrims here!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

Porthos replied by a look expressive of dejection. "Well, then, tell me all about it, Porthos, my friend, unless it is a secret."

"In the first place," returned Porthos, "you know I have no secrets from you. This, then, is what saddens me."

"Wait a minute, Porthos; let me first get rid of all this litter of satin and velvet."

"O, never mind," said Porthos, contemptuously; "it is all trash."

"Trash, Porthos! Cloth at twenty livres an ell! gorgeous satin! regal velvet!"

"Then you think these clothes are——"

"Splendid, Porthos, splendid! I'll wager that you

alone in France have so many; and suppose you never had any more made, and were to live to be a hundred years of age, which wouldn't astonish me in the very least, you could still wear a new dress the day of your death, without being obliged to see the nose of a single tailor from now till then."

Porthos shook his head.

"Come, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "this unnatural melancholy in you frightens me. My dear Porthos, pray get it out then. And the sooner the better."

"Yes, my friend, so I will: if indeed it is possible."

"Perhaps you have received bad news from Bracieux?"

"No: they have felled the wood, and it has yielded a third more than the estimate."

"Then has there been a falling-off in the pools of Pierrefonds?"

"No, my friend; they have been fished, and there is enough left to stock all the pools in the neighborhood."

"Perhaps your estate at Vallon has been destroyed by an earthquake?"

"No, my friend; on the contrary, the ground was struck with lightning a hundred paces from the château, and a fountain sprung up in a place entirely destitute of water."

"What in the world *is* the matter, then?"

"The fact is, I have received an invitation for the *fête* at Vaux," said Porthos, with a lugubrious expression.

"Well! do you complain of that? The king has caused a hundred mortal heart-burnings among the courtiers by refusing invitations. And so, my dear friend, you are really going to Vaux?"

"Indeed I am!"

"You will see a magnificent sight."

"Alas! I doubt it, though."

"Everything that is grand in France will be brought together there!"

"Ah!" cried Porthos, tearing out a lock of his hair in despair.

"Eh! good heavens, are you ill?" cried D'Artagnan.

"I am as firm as the Pont-Neuf! It isn't that."

"But what is it, then?"

"'Tis that I have no clothes!"

D'Artagnan stood petrified. "No clothes! Porthos, no clothes!" he cried, "when I see at least fifty suits on the floor."

"Fifty truly; but not one which fits me!"

"What? not one that fits you? But are you not measured then, when you give an order?"

"To be sure he is," answered Mouston; "but unfortunately *I* have grown stouter?"

"What! *you* stouter?"

"So much so that I am now bigger than the baron. Would you believe it, monsieur?"

"*Parbleu!* it seems to me that is quite evident."

"Do you see, stupid?" said Porthos, "that is quite evident!"

"Be still, my dear Porthos," resumed D'Artagnan, becoming slightly impatient, "I don't understand why your clothes should not fit you, because Mouston has grown stouter."

"I am going to explain it," said Porthos. "You remember having related to me the story of the Roman general Antony, who had always seven wild boars kept roasting, each cooked up to a different point; so that he might be able to have his dinner at any time of the day he chose to ask for it. Well, then, I resolved, as at any time I might be invited to court to spend a week, I resolved to have always seven suits ready for the occasion."

"Capitally reasoned, Porthos—only a man must have

a fortune like yours to gratify such whims. Without counting the time lost in being measured, the fashions are always changing."

"That is exactly the point," said Porthos, "in regard to which I flattered myself I had hit on a very ingenious device."

"Tell me what it is; for I don't doubt your genius."

"You remember what Mouston once was then?"

"Yes; when he used to call himself Mousqueton."

"And you remember, too, the period when he began to grow fatter?"

"No, not exactly. I beg your pardon, my good Mouston."

"Oh! you are not in fault, monsieur," said Mouston, graciously. "You were in Paris, and as for us, we were at Pierrefonds."

"Well, well, my dear Porthos; there was a time when Mouston began to grow fat. Is that what you wished to say?"

"Yes my friend; and I greatly rejoice over the period."

"Indeed, I believe you do," exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"You understand," continued Porthos, "what a world of trouble it spared me."

"No, I don't—by any means."

"Look here, my friend. In the first place, as you have said, to be measured is a loss of time, even though it occur only once a fortnight. And then, one may be travelling; and then you wish to have seven suits always with you. In short, I have a horror of letting any one take my measure. Confound it! either one is a nobleman or not. To be scrutinized and scanned by a fellow who completely analyzes you, by inch and line—'tis degrading! Here, they find you too hollow; there, too prominent. They recognize your strong and weak points. See, now, when we leave the measurer's hands, we are like those strong-

holds whose angles and different thicknesses have been ascertained by a spy."

"In truth, my dear Porthos, you possess ideas entirely original."

"Ah! you see when a man is an engineer——"

"And has fortified Belle-Isle — 'tis natural, my friend."

"Well, I had an idea, which would doubtless have proved a good one, but for Mouston's carelessness."

D'Artagnan glanced at Mouston, who replied by a slight movement of his body, as if to say, "You will see whether I am at all to blame in all this."

"I congratulated myself, then," resumed Porthos, "at seeing Mouston get fat; and I did all I could, by means of substantial feeding, to make him stout—always in the hope that he would come to equal myself in girth, and could then be measured in my stead."

"Ah!" cried D'Artagnan. "I see—that spared you both time and humiliation."

"Consider my joy when, after a year and a half's judicious feeding—for I used to feed him up myself—the fellow——"

"Oh! I lent a good hand myself, monsieur," said Mouston, humbly.

"That's true. Consider my joy when, one morning, I perceived Mouston was obliged to squeeze in, as I once did myself, to get through the little secret door that those fools of architects had made in the chamber of the late Madame du Vallon, in the Château of Pierrefonds. And, by the way, about that door, my friend, I should like to ask you, who know everything, why these wretches of architects, who ought to have the compasses run into them, just to remind them, came to make doorways through which nobody but thin people can pass?"

"Oh, those doors," answered D'Artagnan, "were meant

for gallants, and they have generally slight and slender figures."

"Madame du Vallon had no gallant!" answered Porthos, majestically.

"Perfectly true, my friend," resumed D'Artagnan; "but the architects were probably making their calculations on a basis of the possibility of your marrying again."

"Ah! that is possible," said Porthos. "And now I have received an explanation how it is that doorways are made too narrow, let us return to the subject of Mouston's fatness. But see how the two things apply to each other. I have always noticed that people's ideas run parallel. And so, observe this phenomenon, D'Artagnan. I was talking to you of Mouston, who is fat, and it led us on to Madame du Vallon——"

"Who was thin?"

"Hum! Is it not marvelous?"

"My dear friend, a *savant* of my acquaintance, M. Costar, has made the same observation as you have, and he calls the process by some Greek name which I forget."

"What! my remark is not then original?" cried Porthos, astounded. "I thought I was the discoverer."

"My friend, the fact was known before Aristotle's days—that is to say, nearly two thousand years ago."

"Well, well, 'tis no less true," said Porthos, delighted at the idea of having jumped to a conclusion so closely in agreement with the greatest sages of antiquity.

"Wonderfully—but suppose we return to Mouston. It seems to me, we have left him fattening under our very eyes."

"Yes, monsieur," said Mouston.

"Well," said Porthos, "Mouston fattened so well, that he gratified all my hopes, by reaching my standard; a fact of which I was well able to convince myself, by seeing the

rascal, one day, in a waistcoat of mine, which he had turned into a coat—a waistcoat, the mere embroidery of which was worth a hundred pistoles."

"'Twas only to try it on, monsieur," said Mouston.

"From that moment, I determined to put Mouston in communication with my tailors, and to have him measured instead of myself."

"A capital idea, Porthos; but Mouston is a foot and a half shorter than you."

"Exactly! They measured him down to the ground, and the end of the skirt came just below my knee."

"What a marvelous man you are, Porthos! Such a thing could happen only to you."

"Ah! yes; pay your compliments; you have ample grounds to go upon. It was exactly at that time—that is to say, nearly two years and a half ago—that I set out for Belle-Isle, instructing Mouston (so as always to have, in every event, a pattern of every fashion) to have a coat made for himself every month."

"And did Mouston neglect complying with your instructions? Ah! that was anything but right, Mouston."

"No, monsieur, quite the contrary; quite the contrary!"

"No, he never forgot to have his coats made; but he forgot to inform me that he had got stouter!"

"But it was not my fault, monsieur! your tailor never told me."

"And this to such an extent, monsieur," continued Porthos, "that the fellow in two years has gained eighteen inches in girth, and so my last dozen coats are all too large, from a foot to a foot and a half!"

"But the rest; those which were made when you were of the same size?"

"They are no longer the fashion, my dear friend. Were I to put them on, I should look like a fresh arrival

from Siam; and as though I had been two years away from court."

"I understand your difficulty. You have how many new suits? nine? thirty-six? and yet not one to wear. Well, you must have a thirty-seventh made, and give the thirty-six to Mouston."

"Ah! monsieur!" said Mouston, with a gratified air. "The truth is, that monsieur has always been very generous to me."

"Do you mean to insinuate that I hadn't that idea, or that I was deterred by the expense? But it wants only two days to the *fête;* I received the invitation yesterday; made Mouston post hither with my wardrobe, and only this morning discovered my misfortune; and from now till the day after to-morrow, there isn't a single fashionable tailor who will undertake to make me a suit."

"That is to say, one covered all over with gold, isn't it?"

"I wish it so! undoubtedly all over."

"Oh, we shall manage it. You won't leave for three days. The invitations are for Wednesday, and this is only Sunday morning."

"'Tis true; but Aramis has strongly advised me to be at Vaux twenty-four hours beforehand."

"How, Aramis?"

"Yes, it was Aramis who brought me the invitation."

"Ah! to be sure, I see. You are invited on the part of M. Fouquet?"

"By no means! by the king, dear friend. The letter bears the following as large as life: 'M. le Baron du Vallon is informed that the king has condescended to place him on the invitation list——'"

"Very good; but you leave with M. Fouquet?"

"And when I think," cried Porthos, stamping on the floor, "when I think I shall have no clothes, I am ready

to burst with rage. I should like to strangle somebody or smash something!"

"Neither strangle anybody nor smash anything, Porthos; I will manage it all; put on one of your thirty-six suits, and come with me to a tailor."

"Pooh! my agent has seen them all this morning."

"Even M. Percerin?"

"Who is M. Percerin?"

"Oh! only the king's tailor!"

"Oh, ah, yes," said Porthos, who wished to appear to know the king's tailor, but now heard his name mentioned for the first time;—"to M. Percerin's, by Jove! I was afraid he would be too busy."

"Doubtless he will be; but be at ease, Porthos; he will do for me what he wouldn't do for another. Only you must allow yourself to be measured!"

"Ah!" said Porthos, with a sigh, "'tis vexatious, but what would you have me do?"

"Do? As others do; as the king does."

"What! do they measure the king, too? does *he* put up with it?"

"The king is a beau, my good friend, and so are you, too, whatever you may say about it."

Porthos smiled triumphantly. "Let us go to the king's tailor," he said; "and since he measures the king, I think, by my faith, I may do worse than allow him to measure *me!*"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

WHO MESSIRE JEAN PERCERIN WAS.

The king's tailor, Messire Jean Percerin, occupied a rather large house in the Rue St. Honoré, near the Rue de l'Arbre Sec. He was a man of great taste in elegant

stuffs, embroideries, and velvets, being hereditary tailor to the king. The preferment of his house reached as far back as the time of Charles IX.; from whose reign dated, as we know, fancies in *bravery* difficult enough to gratify. The Percerin of that period was a Huguenot, like Ambroise Paré, and had been spared by the Queen of Navarre, the beautiful Margot, as they used to write and say, too, in those days; because, in sooth, he was the only one who could make for her those wonderful riding-habits which she so loved to wear, seeing that they were marvelously well suited to hide certain anatomical defects, which the Queen of Navarre used very studiously to conceal. Percerin being saved, made, out of gratitude, some beautiful black bodices, very inexpensively indeed, for Queen Catherine, who ended by being pleased at the preservation of a Huguenot people, on whom she had long looked with detestation. But Percerin was a very prudent man; and having heard it said that there was no more dangerous sign for a Protestant than to be smiled upon by Catherine, and having observed that her smiles were more frequent than usual, he speedily turned Catholic with all his family; and having thus become irreproachable, attained the lofty position of master tailor to the Crown of France. Under Henry III., gay king as he was, this position was as grand as the height of one of the loftiest peaks of the Pyrenees. Now Percerin had been a clever man all his life, and by way of keeping up his reputation beyond the grave, took very good care not to make a bad death of it, and so contrived to die very skillfully; and that at the very moment he felt his powers of invention declining. He left a son and daughter, both worthy of the name they were called upon to bear; the son, a cutter as unerring and exact as the square rule; the daughter apt at embroidery, and at designing ornaments. The marriage of Henry IV. and Marie de Medici, and the exquisite court-

mourning for the afore-mentioned queen, together with a few words let fall by M. de Bassompierre, king of the *beaux* of the period, made the fortune of the second generation of Percerins. M. Concino Concini, and his wife Galligaï, who subsequently shone at the French court, sought to Italianize the fashion, and introduced some Florentine tailors; but Percerin, touched to the quick in his patriotism and his self-esteem, entirely defeated these foreigners, and that so well, that Concino was the first to give up his compatriots, and held the French tailor in such esteem, that he would never employ any other; and thus wore a doublet of his on the very day that Vitry blew out his brains with a pistol at the Pont du Louvre.

And so it was a doublet issuing from M. Percerin's workshop, which the Parisians rejoiced in hacking into so many pieces with the living human body it contained. Notwithstanding the favor Concino Concini had shown Percerin, the king, Louis XIII., had the generosity to bear no malice to his tailor, and to retain him in his service. At the time that Louis the Just afforded this great example of equity, Percerin had brought up two sons, one of whom made his *début* at the marriage of Anne of Austria, invented that admirable Spanish costume, in which Richelieu danced a saraband, made the costumes for the tragedy of "Mirame," and stitched on to Buckingham's mantle those famous pearls which were destined to be scattered about the pavements of the Louvre. A man becomes easily notable who has made the dresses of a duke of Buckingham, a M. de Cinq-Mars, a Mademoiselle Ninon, and a Marion de Lorme. And thus Percerin the third had attained the summit of his glory when his father died. This same Percerin III., old, famous and wealthy, yet further dressed Louis XIV.; and having no son, which was a great cause of sorrow to him, seeing

that with himself his dynasty would end, he had brought up several hopeful pupils. He possessed a carriage, a country house, men-servants the tallest in Paris; and by special authority from Louis XIV. a pack of hounds. He worked for MM. de Lyonne and Letellier, under a sort of patronage; but politic man as he was, and versed in State secrets, he never succeeded in fitting M. Colbert. This is beyond explanation; it is a matter for guessing or for intuition. Great geniuses of every kind live on unseen, intangible ideas; they act without themselves knowing why. The great Percerin (for, contrary to the rule of dynasties, it was, above all, the last of the Percerins who deserved the name of Great), the great Percerin was inspired when he cut a robe for the queen, or a coat for the king; he could mount a mantle for Monsieur, the clock of a stocking for Madame; but, in spite of his supreme talent, he could never hit off anything approaching a creditable fit for M. Colbert. "That man," he used often to say, "is beyond my art; my needle can never dot him down." We need scarcely say, that Percerin was M. Fouquet's tailor, and that the superintendent highly esteemed him. M. Percerin was nearly eighty years old, nevertheless still fresh, and at the same time so dry, the courtiers used to say, that he was positively brittle. His renown and his fortune were great enough for M. le Prince, that king of fops, to take his arm when talking over the fashions; and for those least eager to pay never to dare to leave their accounts in arrear with him; for Master Percerin would for the first time make clothes upon credit, but the second never, unless paid for the former order.

It is easy to see at once that a tailor of such renown, instead of running after customers, made difficulties about obliging any fresh ones. And so Percerin declined to fit *bourgeois*, or those who had but recently obtained

patents of nobility. A story used to circulate that even M. de Mazarin, in exchange for Percerin supplying him with a full suit of ceremonial vestments as cardinal, one fine day slipped letters of nobility into his pocket.

It was to the house of this grand llama of tailors that D'Artagnan took the despairing Porthos; who, as they were going along, said to his friend, "Take care, my good D'Artagnan, not to compromise the dignity of a man such as I am with the arrogance of this Percerin, who will, I expect, be very impertinent; for I give you notice, my friend that if he is wanting in respect I will infallibly chastise him."

"Presented by me," replied D'Artagnan, "you have nothing to fear, even though you were what you are not."

"Ah! 'tis because——"

"What? Have you anything against Percerin, Porthos?"

"I think that I once sent Mouston to a fellow of that name."

"And then?"

"The fellow refused to supply me."

"Oh, a misunderstanding, no doubt, which it will be now exceedingly easy to set right. Mouston must have made a mistake."

"Perhaps."

"He has confused the names."

"Possibly. That rascal Mouston never can remember names."

"I will take it all upon myself."

"Very good."

"Stop the carriage, Porthos; here we are."

"Here! how here? We are at the Halles; and you told me the house was at the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre Sec."

"'Tis true, but look."

"Well, I do look, and I see——"

"What?"

"*Pardieu!* that we are at the Halles!"

"You do not, I suppose, want our horses to clamber up on the roof of the carriage in front of us."

"No."

"Nor the carriage in front of us to mount on top of the one in front of it. Nor that the second should be driven over the roofs of the thirty or forty others which have arrived before us?"

"No, you are right, indeed. What a number of people! And what are they all about?"

"'Tis very simple. They are waiting their turn."

"Bah! Have the comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne shifted their quarters?"

"No; their turn to obtain an entrance to M. Percerin's house."

"And we are going to wait too?"

"Oh, we shall show ourselves prompter and not so proud."

"What are we to do then?"

"Get down, pass through the footmen and lackeys, and enter the tailor's house, which I will answer for our doing, if you go first."

"Come along then," said Porthos.

They accordingly alighted and made their way on foot towards the establishment. The cause of the confusion was, that M. Percerin's doors were closed, while a servant standing before them, was explaining to the illustrious customers of the illustrious tailor that just then M. Percerin could not receive anybody. It was bruited about outside still, on the authority of what the great lackey had told some great noble whom he favored, in confidence, that M. Percerin was engaged on five costumes for the king, and that, owing to the urgency of the case, he was medi-

tating in his office on the ornaments, colors, and cut of these five suits. Some, contented with this reason, went away again, contented to repeat the tale to others, but others more tenacious, insisted on having the doors opened, and among these last three Blue Ribbons, intended to take parts in a ballet, which would inevitably fail unless the said three had their costumes shaped by the very hand of the great Percerin himself. D'Artagnan pushing on Porthos, who scattered the groups of people right and left, succeeded in gaining the counter, behind which the journeymen tailors were doing their best to answer queries. (We forgot to mention that at the door they wanted to put off Porthos like the rest, but D'Artagnan, showing himself, pronounced merely these words, "The king's order," and was let in with his friend.) The poor fellows had enough to do, and did their best, to reply to the demands of the customers in the absence of their master, leaving off drawing a stitch to knit a sentence; and when wounded pride, or disappointed expectation, brought down upon them too cutting a rebuke, he who was attacked made a dive and disappeared under the counter. The line of discontented lords formed a truly remarkable picture. Our captain of musketeers, a man of sure and rapid observation, took it all in at a glance; and having run over the groups, his eye rested on a man in front of him. This man, seated upon a stool, scarcely showed his head above the counter that sheltered him. He was about forty years of age, with a melancholy aspect, pale face, and soft luminous eyes. He was looking at D'Artagnan and the rest, with his chin resting upon his hand, like a calm and inquiring amateur. Only on perceiving, and doubtless recognizing, our captain, he pulled his hat down over his eyes. It was this action, perhaps, that attracted D'Artagnan's attention. If so, the gentleman who had pulled down his hat produced an effect entirely different

from what he had desired. In other respects his costume was plain, and his hair evenly cut enough for customers, who were not close observers, to take him for a mere tailor's apprentice, perched behind the board, and carefully stitching cloth or velvet. Nevertheless, this man held up his head too often to be very productively employed with his fingers. D'Artagnan was not deceived,—not he; and he saw at once that if this man was working at anything, it certainly was not at velvet.

"Eh!" said he, addressing this man, "and so you have become a tailor's boy, Monsieur Molière!"

"Hush, M. d'Artagnan!" replied the man, softly, "you will make them recognize me."

"Well, and what harm?"

"The fact is, there is no harm, but——"

"You were going to say there is no good in doing it either, is it not so?"

"Alas! no; for I was occupied in examining some excellent figures."

"Go on—go on; Monsieur Molière. I quite understand the interest you take in the plates—I will not disturb your studies."

"Thank you."

"But on one condition: that you tell me where M. Percerin really is."

"Oh! willingly; in his own room. Only——"

"Only that one can't enter it?"

"Unapproachable."

"For everybody?"

"Everybody. He brought me here so that I might be at my ease to make my observations, and then he went away."

"Well, my dear Monsieur Molière, but you will go and tell him I am here."

"I!" exclaimed Molière, in the tone of a courageous

dog, from which you snatch the bone it has legitimately gained; "I disturb myself! Ah! Monsieur d'Artagnan, how hard you are upon me!"

"If you don't go directly and tell M. Percerin that I am here, my dear Molière," said D'Artagnan, in a low tone, "I warn you of one thing: that I won't exhibit to you the friend I have brought with me."

Molière indicated Porthos by an imperceptible gesture, "This gentleman, is it not?"

"Yes."

Molière fixed upon Porthos one of those looks which penetrate the minds and heart of men. The subject doubtless appeared a very promising one, for he immediately rose and led the way into the adjoining chamber.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE PATTERNS.

During all this time the noble mob was slowly heaving away, leaving at every angle of the counter either a murmur or a menace, as the waves leave foam or scattered seaweed on the sands, when they retire with the ebbing tide. In about ten minutes Molière reappeared, making another sign to D'Artagnan from under the hangings. The latter hurried after him, with Porthos in the rear, and after threading a labyrinth of corridors, introduced him to M. Percerin's room. The old man, with his sleeves turned up, was gathering up in folds a piece of gold-flowered brocade, so as the better to exhibit its luster. Perceiving D'Artagnan, he put the silk aside, and came to meet him, by no means radiant with joy, and by no means courteous, but take it altogether, in a tolerably civil manner.

"The captain of the musketeers will excuse me, I am sure, for I am engaged."

"Eh! yes, on the king's costumes; I know that, my dear Monsieur Percerin. You are making three, they tell me."

"Five, my dear sir, five."

"Three or five, 'tis all the same to me, my dear monsieur; and I know that you will make them most exquisitely."

"Yes, I know. Once made they will be the most beautiful in the world, I do not deny it; but that they may be the most beautiful in the world, they must first be made; and to do this, captain, I am pressed for time."

"Oh, bah! there are two days yet; 'tis much more than you require, Monsieur Percerin," said D'Artagnan, in the coolest possible manner.

Percerin raised his head with the air of a man little accustomed to be contradicted, even in his whims; but D'Artagnan did not pay the least attention to the airs which the illustrious tailor began to assume.

"My dear M. Percerin," he continued, "I bring you a customer."

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed Percerin, crossly.

"M. le Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds," continued D'Artagnan. Percerin attempted a bow, which found no favor in the eyes of the terrible Porthos, who, from his first entry into the room, had been regarding the tailor askance.

"A very good friend of mine," concluded D'Artagnan.

"I will attend to monsieur," said Percerin, "but later."

"Later? but when?"

"When I have time."

"You have already told my valet as much," broke in Porthos, discontentedly.

"Very likely," said Percerin; "I am nearly always pushed for time."

"My friend," returned Porthos, sententiously, "there is always time to be found when one chooses to seek it."

Percerin turned crimson; an ominous sign indeed in old men blanched by age.

"Monsieur is quite at liberty to confer his custom elsewhere."

"Come, come, Percerin," interposed D'Artagnan, "you are not in a good temper to-day. Well, I will say one more word to you, which will bring you on your knees; monsieur is not only a friend of mine, but more, a friend of M. Fouquet's."

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed the tailor, "that is another thing." Then turning to Porthos, "Monsieur le baron is attached to the superintendent?" he inquired.

"I am attached to myself," shouted Porthos, at the very moment that the tapestry was raised to introduce a new speaker in the dialogue. Molière was all observation, D'Artagnan laughed, Porthos swore.

"My dear Percerin," said D'Artagnan, "you will make a dress for the baron. 'Tis I who ask you."

"To you I will not say nay, captain."

"But that is not all; you will make it for him at once."

"'Tis impossible within eight days."

"That, then, is as much as to refuse, because the dress is wanted for the *fête* at Vaux."

"I repeat that it is impossible," returned the obstinate old man.

"By no means, dear Monsieur Percerin, above all if *I* ask you," said a mild voice at the door, a silvery voice which made D'Artagnan prick up his ears. It was the voice of Aramis.

"Monsieur d'Herblay!" cried the tailor.

"Aramis," murmured D'Artagnan.

"Ah! our bishop!" said Porthos.

"Good-morning, D'Artagnan; good-morning, Porthos; good-morning, my dear friends," said Aramis. "Come, come, M. Percerin, make the baron's dress; and I will answer for it you will gratify M. Fouquet." And he accompanied the words with a sign, which seemed to say, "Agree, and dismiss them."

It appeared that Aramis had over Master Percerin an influence superior even to D'Artagnan's, for the tailor bowed in assent, and turning round upon Porthos, said, "Go and get measured on the other side."

Porthos colored in a formidable manner. D'Artagnan saw the storm coming, and addressing Molière, said to him in an undertone, "You see before you, my dear monsieur, a man who considers himself disgraced, if you measure the flesh and bones that Heaven has given him; study this type for me, Master Aristophanes, and profit by it."

Molière had no need of encouragement, and his gaze dwelt long and keenly on the Baron Porthos. "Monsieur," he said, "if you will come with me, I will make them take your measure without the measure touching you."

"Oh!" said Porthos, "how do you make that out, my friend?"

"I say that they shall apply neither line nor rule to the seams of your dress. It is a new method we have invented for measuring people of quality, who are too sensitive to allow low-born fellows to touch them. We know some susceptible persons who will not put up with being measured, a process which, as I think, wounds the natural dignity of man; and if perchance Monsieur should be one of these——"

"*Corbœuf!* I believe I am too!"

"Well, that is a capital and most consolatory coincidence, and you shall have the benefit of our invention."

"But now in the world can it be done?" asked Porthos, delighted.

"Monsieur," said Molière bowing, "if you will deign to follow me, you will see."

Aramis observed this scene with all his eyes. Perhaps he fancied from D'Artagnan's liveliness that he would leave with Porthos, so as not to lose the conclusion of a scene well begun. But, clear-sighted as he was, Aramis deceived himself. Porthos and Molière left together: D'Artagnan remained with Percerin. Why? From curiosity, doubtless; probably to enjoy a little longer the society of his good friend Aramis. As Molière and Porthos disappeared, D'Artagnan drew near the bishop of Vannes, a proceeding which appeared particularly to disconcert him.

"A dress for you, also, is it not, my friend?"

Aramis smiled. "No," said he.

"You will go to Vaux, however?"

"I shall go, but without a new dress. You forget, dear D'Artagnan, that a poor bishop of Vannes is not rich enough to have new dresses for every *fête*."

"Bah!" said the musketeer laughing, "and do we write no more poems now, either?"

"Oh! D'Artagnan," exclaimed Aramis, "I have long ago given up all such tomfoolery."

"True," repeated D'Artagnan, only half convinced. As for Percerin, he was once more absorbed in contemplation of the brocades.

"Don't you perceive," said Aramis, smiling, "that we are greatly boring this good gentleman, my dear D'Artagnan?"

"Ah! ah!" murmured the musketeer, aside; "that is, I am boring you, my friend." Then aloud, "Well, then, let us leave; I have no further business here, and if you are as disengaged as I, Aramis——"

"No, not I—I wished——"

"Ah! you had something particular to say to M. Percerin? Why did you not tell me so at once?"

"Something particular, certainly," repeated Aramis, "but not for you, D'Artagnan. But, at the same time, I hope you will believe that I can never have anything so particular to say that a friend like you may not hear it."

"Oh, no, no! I am going," said D'Artagnan, imparting to his voice an evident tone of curiosity; for Aramis's annoyance, well dissembled as it was, had not a whit escaped him; and he knew that, in that impenetrable mind, everything, even the most apparently trivial, was designed to some end; an unknown one; but an end that, from the knowledge he had of his friend's character, the musketeer felt must be important.

On his part, Aramis saw that D'Artagnan was not without suspicion, and pressed him. "Stay, by all means," he said, "this is what it is." Then turning towards the tailor, "My dear Percerin," said he, "I am even very happy that you are here, D'Artagnan."

"Oh, indeed," exclaimed the Gascon, for the third time, even less deceived this time than before.

Percerin never moved. Aramis roused him violently, by snatching from his hands the stuff upon which he was engaged, "My dear Percerin," said he, "I have, near at hand, M. Lebrun, one of M. Fouquet's painters."

"Ah, very good," thought D'Artagnan; "but why Lebrun?'"

Aramis looked at D'Artagnan, who seemed to be occupied with an engraving of Mark Antony. "And you wish that I should make him a dress, similar to those of the Epicureans?" answered Percerin. And while saying this, in an absent manner, the worthy tailor endeavored to recapture his piece of brocade.

"An Epicurean's dress?" asked D'Artagnan, in a tone of inquiry.

"I see," said Aramis, with a most engaging smile: "it is written that our dear D'Artagnan shall know all our secrets this evening. Yes, friend, you have surely heard speak of M. Fouquet's Epicureans, have you not?"

"Undoubtedly. Is it not a kind of poetical society, of which La Fontaine, Loret, Péllisson, and Molière are members, and which holds its sittings at St. Mandé?"

"Exactly so. Well, we are going to put our poets in uniform, and enrol them in a regiment for the king."

"Oh, very well; I understand; a surprise M. Fouquet is getting up for the king. Be at ease; if that is the secret about M. Lebrun, I will not mention it."

"Always agreeable, my friend. No, Monsieur Lebrun has nothing to do with this part of it; the secret which concerns him is far more important than the other."

"Then, if it is so important as all that, I prefer not to know it," said D'Artagnan, making a show of departure.

"Come in, M. Lebrun, come in," said Aramis, opening a side-door with his right hand, and holding back D'Artagnan with his left.

"I' faith, I, too, am quite in the dark," quoth Percerin.

Aramis took an "opportunity," as is said in theatrical matters.

"My dear M. de Percerin," Aramis continued, "you are making five dresses for the king, are you not? One in brocade; one in hunting-cloth; one in velvet; one in satin; and one in Florentine stuffs."

"Yes; but how—do you know all that, monseigneur?" said Percerin, astounded.

"It is all very simple, my dear monsieur; there will be a hunt, a banquet, concert, promenade and reception; these five kinds of dress are required by etiquette."

"You know everything, monseigneur!"

"And a thing or two in addition," muttered D'Artagnan.

"But," cried the tailor, in triumph, "what you do not know, monseigneur—prince of the church though you are—what nobody will know—what only the king, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and myself do know, is the color of the materials and nature of the ornaments, and the cut, the *ensemble*, the finish of all!"

"Well," said Aramis, "that is precisely what I have come to ask you, dear Percerin."

"Ah, bah!" exclaimed the tailor, terrified, though Aramis had pronounced these words in his softest and most honeyed tones. The request appeared, on reflection, so exaggerated, so ridiculous, so monstrous to M. Percerin that, first he laughed to himself, then aloud, and finished with a shout. D'Artagnan followed his example, not because he found the matter so "very funny" but in order not to allow Aramis to cool.

"At the outset, I appear to be hazarding an absurd question, do I not?" said Aramis. "But D'Artagnan, who is incarnate wisdom itself, will tell you that I could not do otherwise than ask you this."

"Let us see," said the attentive musketeer; perceiving with his wonderful instinct that they had only been skirmishing till now, and that the hour of battle was approaching.

"Let us see," said Percerin, incredulously.

"Why, now," continued Aramis, "does M. Fouquet give the king a *fête?*—Is it not to please him?"

"Assuredly," said Percerin. D'Artagnan nodded assent.

"By delicate attentions? by some happy device? by a succession of surprises, like that of which we were talking?—the enrolment of our Epicureans."

"Admirable."

"Well, then this is the surprise we intend. M. Lebrun here is a man who draws most exactly."

"Yes," said Percerin; "I have seen his pictures, and observed that the dresses were highly elaborated. That is why I at once agreed to make him a costume—whether to agree with those of the Epicureans, or an original one."

"My dear monsieur, we accept your offer, and shall presently avail ourselves of it; but just now, M. Lebrun is not in want of the dresses you will make for himself, but of those you are making for the king."

Percerin made a bound backwards, which D'Artagnan—calmest and most appreciative of men did not consider overdone; so many strange and startling aspects wore the proposal which Aramis had just hazarded. "The king's dresses! Give the king's dresses to any mortal whatever! Oh! for once, monseigneur, your grace is mad!" cried the poor tailor in extremity.

"Help me now, D'Artagnan," said Aramis, more and more calm and smiling. "Help me now to persuade monsieur, for *you* understand; do you not?"

"Eh! eh!—not exactly, I declare."

"What! you do not understand that M. Fouquet wishes to afford the king the surprise of finding his portrait on his arrival at Vaux; and that the portrait, which will be a striking resemblance, ought to be dressed exactly as the king will be on the day it is shown?"

"Oh! yes, yes," said the musketeer, nearly convinced, so plausible was this reasoning. "Yes, my dear Aramis, you are right; it is a happy idea. I will wager it is one of your own, Aramis."

"Well, I don't know," replied the bishop; "either mine or M. Fouquet's." Then scanning Percerin, after noticing D'Artagnan's hesitation. "Well, Monsieur Percerin," he asked, "what do you say to this?"

"I say, that——"

"That you are, doubtless, free to refuse. I know well

—and I by no means count upon compelling you, my dear monsieur. I will say more, I even understand all the delicacy you feel in taking up with M. Fouquet's idea; you dread appearing to flatter the king. A noble spirit, M. Percerin, a noble spirit!" The tailor stammered. "It would, indeed, be a very pretty compliment to pay the young prince," continued Aramis; "but as the surintendant told me, 'if Percerin refuse, tell him that it will not at all lower him in my opinion, and I shall aways esteem him, only——'"

"'Only?'" repeated Percerin, rather troubled.

"'Only,'" continued Aramis, "'I shall be compelled to say to the king,'—you understand, my dear Monsieur Percerin, that these are M. Fouquet's words—'I shall be constrained to say to the king, "Sire, I had intended to present your majesty with your portrait, but owing to a feeling of delicacy, slightly exaggerated perhaps, although creditable, M. Percerin opposed the project."'"

"Opposed!" cried the tailor, terrified at the responsibility which would weigh upon him; "I to oppose the desire, the will of M. Fouquet when he is seeking to please the king! Oh, what a hateful word you have uttered, monseigneur. Oppose! Oh, 'tis not I who said it, Heaven have mercy on me. I call the captain of the musketeers to witness it! Is it not true, Monsieur d'Artagnan, that I have opposed nothing?"

D'Artagnan made a sign indicating that he wished to remain neutral. He felt that there was an intrigue at the bottom of it, whether comedy or tragedy; he was at his wit's end at not being able to fathom it, but in the meanwhile wished to keep clear.

But already Percerin, goaded by the idea that the king was to be told he stood in the way of a pleasant surprise, had offered Lebrun a chair, and proceeded to bring from a wardrobe four magnificent dresses, the fifth being still

in the workmen's hands; and these masterpieces he successively fitted upon four lay figures, which, imported into France in the time of Concini, had been given to Percerin II. by Marshal D'Onore, after the discomfiture of the Italian tailors ruined in their competition. The painter set to work to draw and then to paint the dresses. But Aramis, who was closely watching all the phases of his toil, suddenly stopped him.

"I think you have not quite got it, my dear Lebrun," he said; "your colors will deceive you, and on canvas we shall lack that exact resemblance which is absolutely requisite. Time is necessary for attentively observing the finer shades."

"Quite true," said Percerin, "but time is wanting, and on that head, you will agree with me, monseigneur, I can do nothing."

"Then the affair will fail," said Aramis, quietly, "and that because of a want of precision in the colors."

Nevertheless Leburn went on copying the materials and ornaments with the closest fidelity—a process which Aramis watched with ill-concealed impatience.

"What in the world, now, is the meaning of this imbroglio?" the musketeer kept saying to himself.

"That will never do," said Aramis: "M. Lebrun, close your box, and roll up your canvas."

"But, monsieur," cried the vexed painter, "the light is abominable here."

"An idea, M. Lebrun, an idea! If we had a pattern of the materials, for example, and with time, and a better light——"

"Oh, then," cried Lebrun, "I would answer for the effect."

"Good!" said D'Artagnan, "this ought to be the knotty point of the whole thing; they want a pattern of each of the materials. *Mordioux!* Will this Percerin give in now?"

Percerin, beaten from his last retreat, and duped, moreover, by the feigned good-nature of Aramis, cut out five patterns and handed them to the bishop of Vannes.

"I like this better. That is your opinion, is it not?" said Aramis to D'Artagnan.

"My dear Aramis," said D'Artagnan, "my opinion is that you are always the same."

"And, consequently, always your friend," said the bishop in a charming tone.

"Yes, yes," said D'Artagnan, aloud; then, in a low voice, "If I am your dupe, double Jesuit that you are, I will not be your accomplice; and to prevent it, 'tis time I left this place." "Adieu, Aramis," he added aloud, "adieu; I am going to rejoin Porthos."

"Then wait for me," said Aramis, pocketing the patterns, "for I have done, and shall be glad to say a parting word to our dear old friend."

Lebrun packed up his paints and brushes, Percerin put back the dresses into the closet, Aramis put his hand on his pocket to assure himself the patterns were secure,—and they all left the study.

CHAPTER L.

WHERE, PROBABLY, MOLIÈRE OBTAINED HIS FIRST IDEA OF THE BOURGEOIS GENTILHOMME.

D'Artagnan found Porthos in the adjoining chamber; but no longer an irritated Porthos, or a disappointed Porthos, but Porthos radiant, blooming, fascinating, and chatting with Molière, who was looking upon him with a species of idolatry, and as a man would who had not only never seen anything greater, but not even ever anything so great.

Aramis went straight up to Porthos and offered him his white hand, which lost itself in the gigantic clasp of his old friend,—an operation which Aramis never hazarded without a certain uneasiness. But the friendly pressure having been performed not too painfully for him, the bishop of Vannes passed over to Molière.

"Well, monsieur," said he, "will you come with me to Saint-Mandé."

"I will go anywhere you like, monseigneur," answered Molière.

"To Saint-Mandé!" cried Porthos, surprised at seeing the proud Bishop of Vannes fraternizing with a journeyman tailor. "What, Aramis, are you going to take this gentleman to Saint-Mandé?"

"Yes," said Aramis, smiling, "our work is pressing."

"And besides, my dear Porthos," continued D'Artagnan, "M. Molière is not altogether what he seems."

"In what way?" asked Porthos.

"Why, this gentleman is one of M. Percerin's chief clerks, and is expected at Saint-Mandé to try on the dresses which M. Fouquet has ordered for the Epicureans."

"'Tis precisely so," said Molière.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Come, then, my dear M. Molière," said Aramis, "that is, if you have done with M. du Vallon?"

"We have finished," replied Porthos.

"And you are satisfied?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Completely so," replied Porthos.

Molière took his leave of Porthos with much ceremony, and grasped the hand which the captain of the musketeers furtively offered him.

"Pray, monsieur," concluded Porthos, mincingly, "above all, be exact."

"You will have your dress the day after to-morrow,

monsieur le baron," answered Molière. And he left with Aramis.

Then D'Artagnan, taking Porthos's arm, "What has this tailor done for you, my dear Porthos," he asked, "that you are so pleased with him?"

"What has he done for me, my friend! done for me!" cried Porthos, enthusiastically.

"Yes, I ask you, what has he done for you?"

"My friend, he has done that which no tailor ever yet accomplished; he has taken my measure without touching me!"

"Ah, bah! tell me how he did it?"

"First, then, they went, I don't know where, for a number of lay figures, of all heights and sizes, hoping there would be one to suit mine, but the largest—that of the drum-major of the Swiss guard—was two inches too short, and half a foot too narrow in the chest."

"Indeed!"

"It is exactly as I tell you, D'Artagnan; but he is a great man, or at the very least a great tailor, is this M. Molière. He was not at all put at fault by the circumstance."

"What did he do, then?"

"Oh! it is a very simple matter. I' faith, 'tis an unheard of thing that people should have been so stupid as not to have discovered this method from the first. What annoyance and humiliation they would have spared me!"

"Not to speak of the costumes, my dear Porthos."

"Yes, thirty dresses."

"Well, my dear Porthos, come, tell me M. Molière's plan."

"Molière? You call him so, do you? I shall make a point of recollecting his name."

"Yes; or Poquelin, if you prefer that."

"No; I like Molière best. When I wish to recollect his name, I shall think of *volière* [an aviary]; and as I have one at Pierrefonds——"

"Capital!" returned D'Artagnan. "And M. Molière's plan?"

"'Tis this; instead of pulling me to pieces, as all these rascals do—of making me bend my back, and double my joints—all of them low and dishonorable practices——" D'Artagnan made a sign of approbation with his head. "'Monsieur,' he said to me," continued Porthos, "'a gentleman ought to measure himself. Do me the pleasure to draw near this glass;' and I drew near the glass. I must own I did not exactly understand what this good M. Volière wanted with me."

"Molière?"

"Ah! yes, Molière—Molière. And as the fear of being measured still possessed me, 'Take care,' said I to him, 'what you are going to do with me; I am very ticklish, I warn you.' But he, with his soft voice (for he is a courteous fellow, we must admit, my friend), he with his soft voice, 'Monsieur,' said he, 'that your dress may fit you well, it must be made according to your figure. Your figure is exactly reflected in this mirror. We shall take the measure of this reflection.'"

"In fact," said D'Artagnan, "you saw yourself in the glass; but where did they find one in which you could see your whole figure?"

"My good friend, it is the very glass in which the king is used to look to see himself."

"Yes; but the king is a foot and a half shorter than you are."

"Ah! well, I know not how that may be; it is, no doubt, a cunning way of flattering the king; but the looking-glass was too large for me. 'Tis true that its height was made up of three Venetian plates of glass, placed one above another, and its breadth of three similar parallelograms in juxtaposition."

"Oh, Porthos! what excellent words you have com-

mand of. Where in the world did you acquire such a voluminous vocabulary?"

"At Belle-Isle. Aramis and I had to use such words in our strategic studies and castramentative experiments."

D'Artagnan recoiled, as though the sesquipedalian syllables had knocked the breath out of his body.

"Let us return to the looking-glass, my friend."

"Then, this good M. Volière——"

"Molière."

"Yes—Molière—you are right. You will see now, my dear friend, that I shall recollect his name quite well. This excellent M. Molière set to work tracing out lines on the mirror, with a piece of Spanish chalk, following in all the make of my arms and my shoulders, all the while expounding this maxim, which I thought admirable: 'It is advisable that a dress should not incommode its wearer.'"

"In reality," said D'Artagnan, "that is an excellent maxim, which is, unfortunately, seldom carried out in practice."

"That is why I found it all the more astonishing, when he expatiated upon it."

"Ah! he expatiated?"

"*Parbleu!*"

"Let me hear his theory."

"'Seeing that,' he continued, 'one may, in awkward circumstances, or in a troublesome position, have one's doublet on one's shoulder, and not desire to take one's doublet off——'"

"True," said D'Artagnan.

"'And so,' continued M. Volière——"

"Molière."

"Molière, yes. 'And so,' went on M. Molière, 'you want to draw your sword, monsieur, and you have your doublet on your back. What do you do?'

"'I take it off,' I answered.

"'Well, no,' he replied.

"'How, no?'

"'I say that the dress should be so well made, that it will in no way encumber you, even in drawing your sword.'

"'Ah, ah!'

"'Throw yourself on guard,' pursued he.

"I did it with such wondrous firmness, that two panes of glass burst out of the window.

"''Tis nothing, nothing,' said he. 'Keep your position.'

"I raised my left arm in the air, the forearm gracefully bent, the ruffle drooping, and my wrist curved, while my right arm, half extended, securely covered my wrist with the elbow, and my breast with the wrist."

"Yes," said d'Artagnan, "'tis the true guard—the academic guard."

"You have said the very word, dear friend. In the meanwhile, Volière——"

"Molière."

"Hold! I should certainly, after all, prefer to call him —what did you say his other name was?"

"Poquelin."

"I prefer to call him Poquelin."

"And how will you remember this name better than the other?"

"You understand, he calls himself Poquelin, does he not?"

"Yes."

"If I were to call to mind Madame Coquenard."

"Good."

"And change *Coc* into *Poc*, *nard* into *lin;* and instead of Coquenard I shall have Poquelin."

"'Tis wonderful," cried D'Artagnan, astounded. "Go on, my friend, I am listening to you with admiration."

"This Coquelin sketched my arm on the glass."

"I beg your pardon—Poquelin."

"What did I say, then?"

"You said Coquelin."

"Ah! true. This Poquelin, then, sketched my arm on the glass; but he took his time over it; he kept looking at me a good deal. The fact is, that I must have been looking particularly handsome.

"'Does it weary you?' he asked.

"'A little,' I replied, bending a little in my hands, 'but I could hold out for an hour or so longer.'

"'No, no, I will not allow it; the willing fellows will make it a duty to support your arms, as of old, men supported those of the prophet.'

"'Very good,' I answered.

"'That will not be humiliating to you?'

"'My friend,' said I, 'there is, I think, a great difference between being supported and being measured.'"

"The distinction is full of the soundest sense," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"Then," continued Porthos, "he made a sign, two lads approached; one supported my left arm while the other, with infinite address, supported my right."

"'Another, my man,' cried he. A third approached. 'Support Monsieur by the waist,' said he. The *garçon* complied."

"So that you were at rest?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Perfectly; and Pocquenard drew me on the glass."

"Poquelin, my friend."

"Poquelin—you are right. Stay, decidedly I prefer calling him Volière."

"Yes; and then it was over, wasn't it?"

"During that time Volière drew me as I appeared in the mirror."

"'Twas delicate in him."

"I much like the plan; it is respectful, and keeps every one in his place."

"And there it ended?"

"Without a soul having touched me, my friend."

"Except the three *garçons* who supported you."

"Doubtless; but I have, I think, already explained to you the difference there is between supporting and measuring."

"'Tis true," answered D'Artagnan; who said afterwards to himself, "I'faith, I greatly deceive myself, or I have been the means of a good windfall to that rascal Molière, and we shall assuredly see the scene hit off to the life in some comedy or other." Porthos smiled.

"What are you laughing at?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Must I confess? Well, I was laughing over my good fortune."

"Oh, that is true; I don't know a happier man than you. But what is this last piece of luck that has befallen you?"

"Well, my dear fellow, congratulate me."

"I desire nothing better."

"It seems that I am the first who has had his measure taken in that manner."

"Are you sure of it?"

"Nearly so. Certain signs of intelligence which passed between Volière and the other *garçons* showed me the fact."

"Well, my friend, that does not surprise me from Molière," said D'Artagnan.

"Volière, my friend."

"Oh, no, no, indeed! I am very willing to leave you to go on saying Volière; but, as for me, I shall continue to say Molière. Well, this, I was saying, does not surprise me, coming from Molière, who is a very ingenious fellow, and inspired you with this grand idea."

"It will be of great use to him by and by, I am sure."

"Won't it be of use to him, indeed? I believe you it will, and that in the highest degree;—for you see my friend Molière is of all known tailors the man who best clothes our barons, comtes, and marquises—according to their measure."

On this observation, neither the application nor depth of which shall we discuss, D'Artagnan and Porthos quitted M. de Percerin's house and rejoined their carriage, wherein we will leave them, in order to look after Molière and Aramis at Saint Mandé.

CHAPTER LI.

THE BEE-HIVE, THE BEES, AND THE HONEY.

The Bishop of Vannes, much annoyed at having met D'Artagnan at M. Percerin's, returned to Saint Mandé in no very good humor. Molière, on the other hand, quite delighted at having made such a capital rough sketch, and at knowing where to find its original again, whenever he should desire to convert his sketch into a picture, Molière arrived in the merriest of moods. All the first story of the left wing was occupied by the most celebrated Epicureans in Paris, and those on the freest footing in the house—every one in his compartment, like the bees in their cells, employed in producing the honey intended for that royal cake which M. Fouquet proposed to offer his majesty Louis XIV. during the *fête* at Vaux. Pélisson, his head leaning on his hand, was engaged in drawing out the plan of the prologue to the "Fâcheux," a comedy in three acts, which was to be put

on the stage by Poquelin de Molière, as D'Artagnan called him, or Coquelin de Volière, as Porthos styled him. Loret, with all the charming innocence of a gazetteer,—the gazetteers of all ages have always been so artless!—Loret was composing an account of the *fêtes* of Vaux, before those *fêtes* had taken place. La Fontaine sauntered about from one to the other, a peripatetic, absent-minded, boring, unbearable dreamer, who kept buzzing and humming at everybody's elbow a thousand poetic abstractions. He so often disturbed Pélisson, that the latter, raising his head, crossly said, "At least, La Fontaine, supply me with a rhyme, since you have the run of the gardens at Parnassus."

"What rhyme do you want?" asked the *Fabler*, as Madame de Sévigné used to call him.

"I want a rhyme to *lumière*."

"*Ornière*," answered La Fontaine.

"Ah, but, my good friend, one cannot talk of *wheel-ruts* when celebrating the delights of Vaux," said Loret.

"Besides, it doesn't rhyme," answered Pélisson.

"What! doesn't rhyme!" cried La Fontaine, in surprise.

"Yes; you have an abominable habit, my friend,—a habit which will ever prevent your becoming a poet of the first order. You rhyme in a slovenly manner."

"Oh, oh, you think so, do you, Pélisson?"

"Yes, I do, indeed. Remember that a rhyme is never good so long as one can find a better."

"Then I will never write anything again save in prose," said La Fontaine, who had taken up Pélisson's reproach in earnest. "Ah! I often suspected I was nothing but a rascally poet! Yes, 'tis the very truth."

"Do not say so; your remark is too sweeping, and there is much that is good in your 'Fables.'"

"And to begin," continued La Fontaine, following up his

idea, "I will go and burn a hundred verses I have just made."

"Where are your verses?"

"In my head."

"Well, if they are in your head you cannot burn them."

"True," said La Fontaine; "but if I do not burn them——"

"Well, what will happen if you do not burn them?"

"They will remain, in my mind, and I shall never forget them?"

"The deuce!" cried Loret; "what a dangerous thing! One would go mad with it!"

"The deuce! the deuce!" repeated La Fontaine; "what can I do?"

"I have discovered the way," said Molière, who had entered just at this point of the conversation.

"What way?"

"Write them first and burn them afterwards."

"How simple! Well, I should never have discovered that. What a mind that devil of a Molière has!" said La Fontaine. Then, striking his forehead, "Oh, thou wilt never be aught but an ass, Jean La Fontaine!" he added.

"*What* are you saying there, my friend?" broke in Molière, approaching the poet, whose aside he had heard.

"I say I shall never be aught but an ass," answered La Fontaine, with a heavy sigh and swimming eyes. "Yes, my friend," he added, with increasing grief, "it seems that I rhyme in a slovenly manner."

"Oh, 'tis wrong to say so."

"Nay, I am a poor creature!"

"Who said so?"

"*Parbleu!* 'twas Péiisson; did you not, Pélisson?"

Pelisson, again absorbed in his work, took good care not to answer.

"But if Pélisson said you were so," cried Molière, "Pélisson has seriously offended you."

"Do you think so?"

"Ah! I advise you as you are a gentleman, not to leave an insult like that unpunished."

"*What!*" exclaimed La Fontaine.

"Did you ever fight?"

"Once only, with a lieutenant in the light horse."

"What wrong had he done you?"

"It seems he ran away with my wife."

"Ah, ah!" said Molière, becoming slightly pale; but, as at La Fontaine's declaration, the others had turned round, Molière kept upon his lips the rallying smile which had so nearly died away, and continuing to make La Fontaine speak——

"And what was the result of the duel?"

"The result was, that on the ground my opponent disarmed me, and then made an apology, promising never again to set foot in my house."

"And you considered yourself satisfied," said Molière.

"Not at all! on the contrary, I picked up my sword. 'I beg your pardon, monsieur,' I said, 'I have not fought you because you were my wife's friend, but because I was told I ought to fight. So, as I have never known any peace save since you made her acquaintance, do me the pleasure to continue your visits as heretofore, or *morbleu!* let us set to again.' And so," continued La Fontaine, "he was compelled to resume his friendship with madame, and I continue to be the happiest of husbands."

All burst out laughing. Molière alone passed his hand across his eyes. Why? Perhaps to wipe away a tear, perhaps to smother a sigh. Alas! we know that Molière was a moralist, but he was not a philosopher. "'Tis all one," he said, returning to the topic of the conversation, "Pélisson has insulted you."

"Ah, truly! I had already forgotten it."

"And I am going to challenge him on your behalf."

"Well, you can do so, if you think it indispensable."

"I do think it indispensable, and I am going to——"

"Stay," exclaimed La Fontaine, "I want your advice."

"Upon what? this insult?"

"No; tell me really now whether *lumière* does not rhyme with *ornière*."

"I should make them rhyme."

"Ah! I knew you would."

"And I have made a hundred thousand such rhymes in my time."

"A hundred thousand!" cried La Fontaine. "Four times as many as 'La Pucelle,' which M. Chaplain is meditating. Is it also on this subject, too, that you have composed a hundred thousand verses?"

"Listen to me, you eternally absent-minded creature," said Molière.

"It is certain," continued La Fontaine, "that *légume*, for instance, rhymes with *posthume*."

"In the plural, above all."

"Yes, above all in the plural, seeing that then it rhymes not with three letters, but with four; as *ornière* does with *lumière*."

"But give me *ornières* and *lumières* in the plural, my dear Pélisson," said La Fontaine, clapping his hand on the shoulder of his friend, whose insult he had quite forgotten, "and they will rhyme."

"Hem!" coughed Pélisson.

"Molière says so, and Molière is a judge of such things; he declares he has himself made a hundred thousand verses."

"Come," said Molière, laughing, "he is off now."

"It is like *rivage*, which rhymes admirably with *herbage*. I would take my oath of it."

"But——" said Molière.

"I tell you all this," continued La Fontaine, "because you are preparing a *divertissement* for Vaux, are you not?"

"Yes, the 'Fâcheux,'"

"Ah, yes, the 'Fâcheux;' yes, I recollect. Well, I was thinking a prologue would admirably suit your *divertissement.*"

"Doubtless it would suit capitally."

"Ah! you are of my opinion?"

"So much so, that I have asked you to write this very prologue."

"You asked *me* to write it?"

"Yes, you, and on your refusal begged you to ask Pélisson, who is engaged upon it at this moment."

"Ah! that is what Pélisson is doing then?"

"I' faith, my dear Molière, you are indeed often right."

"When?"

"When you call me absent-minded. It is a monstrous defect; I will cure myself of it, and do your prologue for you."

"But inasmuch as Pélisson is about it!——"

"Ah, true, miserable rascal that I am! Loret was indeed right in saying I was a poor creature."

"It was not Loret who said so, my friend."

"Well, then, whoever said so, 'tis the same to me! And so your *divertissement* is called the 'Fâcheux?' Well, can you not make *heureux* rhyme with *fâcheux?*"

"If obliged, yes."

"And even with *capricieux.*"

"Oh, no, no."

"It would be hazardous, and yet why so?"

"There is too great a difference in the cadences."

"I was fancying," said La Fontaine, leaving Molière for Loret—"I was fancying——"

"What were you fancying?" said Loret, in the middle of a sentence. "Make haste."

"You are writing the prologue to the 'Fâcheux,' are you not?"

"No! *mordieu!* it is Pélisson."

"Ah, Pelisson!" cried La Fontaine, going over to him. "I was fancying," he continued, "that the nymph of Vaux——"

"Ah! beautiful!" cried Loret. "The nymph of Vaux! thank you, La Fontaine; you have just given me the two concluding verses of my paper."

"Well, if you can rhyme so well, La Fontaine," said Pélisson, "tell me now in what way you would begin my prologue?"

"I should say, for instance, 'Oh! nymph, who——' After 'who' I should place a verb in the second person singular of the present indicative; and should go on thus: 'this grot profound.'"

"But the verb, the verb?" asked Pélisson.

"To admire the greatest king of all kings round," continued La Fontaine.

"But the verb, the verb," obstinately insisted Pélisson. "This second person singular of the present indicative?"

"Well, then; quittest:—

> "O, nymph, who quittest now this grot profound,
> To admire the greatest king of all kings round."

"You would put 'who quittest,' would you?"

"Why not?"

"'Quittest,' after 'you who?'"

"Ah! my dear fellow," exclaimed La Fontaine, "you are a shocking pedant!"

"Without counting," said Molière, "that the second verse, 'king of all kings round,' is very weak, my dear La Fontaine."

"Then you see clearly I am nothing but a poor creature,—a shuffler, as you said."

"I never said so."

"Then, as Loret said."

"And it was not Loret either; it was Pélisson."

"Well, Pélisson was right a hundred times over. But what annoys me more than anything, my dear Molière, is, that I fear we shall not have our Epicurean dresses."

"You expected yours, then, for the *fête?*"

"Yes, for the *fête*, and then for after the *fête*. My housekeeper told me that my own is rather faded."

"*Diable!* your housekeeper is right; rather more than faded."

"Ah, you see," resumed La Fontaine, "the fact is, I left it on the floor in my room, and my cat——"

"Well, your cat——"

"She made her nest upon it, which has rather changed its color."

Molière burst out laughing; Pelisson and Loret followed his example. At this juncture, the Bishop of Vannes appeared, with a roll of plans and parchments under his arm. As if the angel of death had chilled all gay and sprightly fancies—as if that wan form had scared away the Graces to whom Xenocrates sacrificed—silence immediately reigned through the study, and every one resumed his self-possession and his pen. Aramis distributed the notes of invitation, and thanked them in the name of M. Fouquet. "The superintendent," he said, "being kept to his room by business, could not come and see them, but begged them to send him some of the fruits of their day's work, to enable him to forget the fatigue of his labor in the night."

At these words, all settled down to work. La Fontaine placed himself at a table, and set his rapid pen an endless dance across the smooth white vellum; Pélisson

made a fair copy of his prologue; Molière contributed fifty fresh verses, with which his visit to Percerin had inspired him; Loret, an article on the marvelous *fêtes* he predicted; and Aramis, laden with his booty like the king of the bees, that great black drone, decked with purple and gold, re-entered his apartment, silent and busy. But before departing, "Remember, gentlemen," said he, "we leave to-morrow evening."

"In that case, I must give notice at home," said Molière.

"Yes; poor Molière!" said Loret, smiling; "he loves his home."

"'*He* loves,' yes," replied Molière, with his sad, sweet smile. "'He loves,' that does not mean, they love *him*."

"As for me, said La Fontaine, "they love me at Château Thierry, I am very sure."

Aramis here re-entered after a brief disappearance. "Will any one go with me?" he asked. "I am going by Paris, after having passed a quarter of an hour with M. Fouquet. I offer my carriage."

"Good," said Molière, "I accept it. I am in a hurry."

"I shall dine here," said Loret. "M. de Gourville has promised me some craw-fish."

"He has promised me some whitings. Find a rhyme for that, La Fontaine."

Aramis went out laughing, as only he could laugh, and Molière followed him. They were at the bottom of the stairs, when La Fontaine opened the door, and shouted out:—

"He has promised us some whitings,
In return for these our writings."

The shouts of laughter reached the ears of Fouquet at the moment Aramis opened the door of the study. As to Molière, he had undertaken to order the horses, while

Aramis went to exchange a parting word with the superintendent. "Oh, how they are laughing there!" said Fouquet, with a sigh.

"Do you not laugh, monseigneur?"

"I laugh no longer now, M. d'Herblay. The *fête* is approaching; money is departing."

"Have I not told you that was my business?"

"Yes, you promised me millions."

"You shall have them the day after the king's *entrée* into Vaux."

Fouquet looked closely at Aramis, and passed the back of his icy hand across his moistened brow. Aramis perceived that the superintendent either doubted him, or felt he was powerless to obtain the money. How could Fouquet suppose that a poor bishop, ex-abbé, ex-musketeer, could find any?

"Why doubt me?" said Aramis. Fouquet smiled and shook his head.

"Man of little faith!" added the bishop.

"My dear M. d'Herblay," answered Fouquet, "if I fall——"

"Well; if you 'fall?'"

"I shall, at least, fall from such a height, that I shall shatter myself in falling." Then giving himself a shake, as though to escape from himself, "Whence come you," said he, "my friend?"

"From Paris—from Percerin."

"And what have you been doing at Percerin's, for I suppose you attach no such great importance to our poet's dresses?"

"No; I went to prepare a surprise."

"Surprise?"

"Yes; which you are to give to the king."

"And will it cost much?"

"Oh! a hundred pistoles you will give Lebrun."

"A painting?—Ah! all the better! And what is this painting to represent?"

"I will tell you; then at the same time, whatever you may say or think of it, I went to see the dresses for our poets."

"Bah! and they will be rich and elegant?"

"Splendid! There will be few great monseigneurs with so good. People will see the difference there is between the courtiers of wealth and those of friendship."

"Ever generous and grateful, dear prelate."

"In your school."

Fouquet grasped his hand. "And where are you going?" he said.

"I am off to Paris, when you shall have given a certain letter."

"For whom?"

"M. de Lyonne."

"And what do you want with Lyonne?"

"I wish to make him sign a *lettre de cachet*."

"'*Lettre de cachet!*' Do you desire to put somebody in the Bastile?"

"On the contrary—to let somebody out."

"And who?"

"A poor devil—a youth, a lad who has been Bastiled these ten years, for two Latin verses he made against the Jesuits."

"'Two Latin verses!' and, for 'two Latin verses,' the miserable being has been in prison for ten years!"

"Yes!"

"And has committed no other crime?"

"Beyond this, he is as innocent as you or I."

"On your word?"

"On my honor!"

"And his name is——"

"Seldon."

"Yes.—But it is too bad. You knew this, and you never told me!"

"'Twas only yesterday his mother applied to me, monseigneur."

"And the woman is poor!"

"In the deepest misery."

"Heaven," said Fouquet, "sometimes bears with such injustice on earth, that I hardly wonder there are wretches who doubt of its existence. Stay, M. d'Herblay." And Fouquet, taking a pen, wrote a few rapid lines to his colleague Lyonne. Aramis took the letter and made ready to go.

"Wait," said Fouquet. He opened his drawer, and took out ten government notes which were there, each for a thousand francs, "Stay," he said; "set the son at liberty, and give this to the mother; but, above all, do not tell her——"

"What, monseigneur?"

"That she is ten thousand livres richer than I. She would say, I am but a poor superintendent! Go! and I pray that God will bless those who are mindful of his poor!"

"So also do I pray," replied Aramis, kissing Fouquet's hand.

And he went out quickly, carrying off the letter for Lyonne and the notes for Seldon's mother, and taking up Molière, who was beginning to lose patience.

CHAPTER LII.

ANOTHER SUPPER AT THE BASTILE.

Seven o'clock sounded from the great clock of the Bastile, that famous clock, which like all the accessories

of the state prison, the very use of which is a torture, recalled to the prisoners' minds the destination of every hour of their punishment. The time-piece of the Bastile, adorned with figures, like most of the clocks of the period, represented St. Peter in bonds. It was the supper hour of the unfortunate captives. The doors grating on their enormous hinges, opened for the passage of the baskets and trays of provisions, the abundance and the delicacy of which, as M. de Baisemeaux has himself taught us, was regulated by the condition in life of the prisoner. We understand on this head the theories of M. de Baisemeaux, sovereign dispenser of gastronomic delicacies, head cook of the royal-fortress, whose trays, full-laden, were ascending the steep staircases, carrying some consolation to the prisoners in the shape of honestly-filled bottles of good vintages. This same hour was that of M. le Gouverneur's supper also. He had a guest to-day, and the spit turned more heavily than usual. Roast partridges flanked with quails and flanking a larded leveret; boiled fowls; ham, fried and sprinkled with white wine, *cardons* of Guipuzcoa and *la bisque d'écrevisses:* these together with soups and *hors d'œuvres*, constituted the governor's bill of fare. Baisemeaux, seated at table, was rubbing his hands and looking at the bishop of Vannes, who, booted like a cavalier, dressed in gray and sword at side, kept talking of his hunger and testifying the liveliest impatience. M. de Baisemeaux de Montlezun was not accustomed to the unbending movements of his Greatness my lord of Vannes, and this evening, Aramis becoming sprightly, volunteered confidence on confidence. The prelate had again a little touch of the musketeer about him. The bishop just trenched on the borders only of license in his style of conversation. As for M. de Baisemeaux, with the facility of vulgar people, he gave himself up entirely upon this point of his guest's freedom. "Mon-

sieur," said he, "for indeed to-night I dare not call you monseigneur."

"By no means," said Aramis; "call me monsieur; I am booted."

"Do you know, monsieur, of whom you remind me this evening?"

"No! faith," said Aramis, taking up his glass; "but I hope I remind you of a capital guest."

"You remind me of two, monsieur. François, shut the window; the wind may annoy his Greatness."

"And let him go," added Aramis. "The supper is completely served, and we shall eat it very well without waiters. I like exceedingly to be *tête-á-tête* when I am with a friend." Baisemeaux bowed respectfully.

"I like exceedingly," continued Aramis, "to help myself."

"Retire, François," cried Baisemeaux. "I was saying that your Greatness puts me in mind of two persons; one very illustrious, the late cardinal, the great Cardinal de la Rochelle, who wore boots like you."

"Indeed," said Aramis; "and the other?"

"The other was a certain musketeer, very handsome, very brave, very adventurous, very fortunate, who, from being abbé, turned musketeer, and from musketeer turned abbé." Aramis condescended to smile. "From abbé," continued Baisemeaux, encouraged by Aramis's smile—"from abbé, bishop,—and from bishop——"

"Ah! stay there, I beg," exclaimed Aramis.

"I have just said, monsieur, that you gave me the idea of a cardinal."

"Enough, dear M. Baisemeaux. As you said, I have on the boots of a cavalier, but I do not intend, for all that, to embroil myself with the church this evening."

"But you have wicked intentions, nevertheless, monseigneur."

"Oh, yes, wicked I own, as everything mundane is."

"You traverse the town and the streets in disguise?"

"In disguise, as you say."

"And do you still make use of your sword?"

"Yes, I should think so; but only when I am compelled. Do me the pleasure to summon François."

"Have you no wine there?"

"'Tis not for wine, but because it is hot here, and the window is shut."

"I shut the windows at supper-time so as not to hear the sounds or the arrival of couriers."

"Ah, yes. You hear them when the window is open?"

"But too well, and that disturbs me. You understand?"

"Nevertheless I am suffocated. François." François entered. "Open the windows, I pray you, Master François," said Aramis. "You will allow him, dear M. Baisemeaux?"

"You are at home here," answered the governor. The window was opened. "Do you not think," said M. de Baisemeaux, "that you will find yourself very lonely, now M. de la Fère has returned to his household gods at Blois? He is a very old friend, is he not?"

"You know it as I do, Baisemeaux, seeing that you were in the musketeers with us."

"Bah! with my friends I reckon neither bottles of wine nor years."

"And you are right. But I do more than love M. de la Fère, dear Baisemeaux; I venerate him."

"Well, for my part, though 'tis singular," said the governor, "I prefer M. d'Artagnan to him. There is a man for you, who drinks long and well! That kind of people allow you at least to penetrate their thoughts."

"Baisemeaux, make me tipsy to-night; let us have a merry time of it as of old, and if I have a trouble at the bot-

tom of my heart, I promise you, you shall see it as you would a diamond at the bottom of your glass."

"Bravo!" said Baisemeaux, and he poured out a great glass of wine and drank it off at a draught, trembling with joy at the idea of being, by hook or by crook, in the secret of some high archiepiscopal misdemeanor. While he was drinking he did not see with what attention Aramis was noting the sounds in the great court. A courier came in about eight o'clock as François brought in the fifth bottle, and, although the courier made a great noise, Baisemeaux heard nothing.

"The devil take him," said Aramis.

"What! who?" asked Baisemeaux. "I hope 'tis neither the wine you drink nor he who is the cause of your drinking it."

"No; it is a horse, who is making noise enough in the court for a whole squadron."

"Pooh! some courier or other," replied the governor, redoubling his attention to the passing bottle.

"Yes; and may the devil take him, and so quickly that we shall never hear him speak more. Hurrah! hurrah!"

"You forget me, Baisemeaux! my glass is empty," said Aramis lifting his dazzling Venetian goblet.

"Upon my honor, you delight me. François, wine!" François entered. "Wine, fellow! and better."

"Yes, monsieur, yes; but a courier has just arrived."

"Let him go to the devil, I say."

"Yes, monsieur, but——"

"Let him leave his news at the office; we will see to it to-morrow. To-morrow, there will be time to-morrow; there will be daylight," said Baisemeaux, chanting the words.

"Ah, monsieur," grumbled the soldier François, in spite of himself, "monsieur."

"Take care," said Aramis, "take care!"

"Of what? dear M. d'Herblay," said Baisemeaux, half intoxicated.

"The letter which the courier brings to the governor of a fortress is sometimes an order."

"Nearly always."

"Do not orders issue from the ministers?"

"Yes, undoubtedly; but——"

"And what do these ministers do but countersign the signature of the king?"

"Perhaps you are right. Nevertheless, 'tis very tiresome when you are sitting before a good table, *tête-à-tête* with a friend——Ah! I beg your pardon, monsieur; I forgot it is I who engage you at supper, and that I speak to a future cardinal."

"Let us pass over that, dear Baisemeaux, and return to our soldier, to François."

"Well, and what has François done?"

"He has demurred!"

"He was wrong, then."

"However, he *has* demurred, you see; 'tis because there is something extraordinary in this matter. It is very possible that it was not François who was wrong in demurring, but you, who are in the wrong in not listening to him."

"Wrong? I to be wrong before François? that seems rather hard."

"Pardon me, merely an irregularity. But I thought it my duty to make an observation which I deem important."

"Oh! perhaps you are right," stammered Baisemeaux. "The king's order is sacred; but as to orders that arrive when one is at supper, I repeat that the devil——"

"If you had said as much to the great cardinal—hem!

my dear Baisemeaux, and if his order had any importance."

"I do it that I may not disturb a bishop. *Mordioux!* am I not, then, excusable?"

"Do not forget, Baisemeaux, that I have worn the soldier's coat, and I am accustomed to obedience everywhere."

"You wish, then——"

"I wish that you would do your duty, my friend; yes, at least before this soldier."

"'Tis mathematically true," exclaimed Baisemeaux. François still waited: "Let them send this order of the king's up to me," he repeated, recovering himself. And he added in a low tone, "Do you know what it is? I will tell you something about as interesting. 'Beware of fire near the powder magazine;' or, 'Look close after such and such a one, who is clever at escaping.' Ah! if you only knew, monseigneur, how many times I have been suddenly awakened from the very sweetest, deepest slumber, by messengers arriving at full gallop to tell me, or rather, bring me a slip of paper containing these words: 'Monsieur de Baisemeaux, what news?' 'Tis clear enough that those who waste their time writing such orders have never slept in the Bastile. They would know better; they have never considered the thickness of my walls, the vigilance of my officers, the number of rounds we go. But, indeed, what can you expect, monseigneur? It is their business to write and torment me when I am at rest, and to trouble me when I am happy," added Baisemeaux, bowing to Aramis.

"Then let them do their business. And do you do yours," added the bishop, smiling.

François re-entered; Baisemeaux took from his hands the minister's order. He slowly undid it, and as slowly read it. Aramis pretended to be drinking, so as to be able

to watch his host through the glass. Then, Baisemeaux having read it: "What was I just saying?" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked the bishop.

"An order of release! There, now; excellent news indeed to disturb us!"

"Excellent news for him whom it concerns, you will at least agree, my dear governor!"

"And at eight o'clock in the evening!"

"It is charitable!"

"Oh! charity is all very well, but it is for that fellow who says he is so weary and tired, but not for me who am amusing myself," said Baisemeaux, exasperated.

"Will you lose by him, then? And is the prisoner who is to be set at liberty a good payer?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! a miserable, five-franc rat!"

"Let me see it," asked M. d'Herblay. "It is no indiscretion?"

"By no means; read it."

"There is, 'Urgent,' on the paper; you have seen that, I suppose?"

"Oh, admirable! 'Urgent!'—a man who has been there ten years! It is *urgent* to set him free-to day, this very evening, at eight o'clock!—*urgent!*" And Baisemeaux, shrugging his shoulders with an air of supreme disdain, flung the order on the table and began eating again.

"They are fond of these tricks!" he said, with his mouth full; "they seize a man, some fine day, keep him under lock and key for ten years, and write to you, 'Watch this fellow well,' or 'Keep him very strictly.' And then, as soon as you are accustomed to look upon the prisoner as a dangerous man, all of a sudden, without rhyme or reason they write—'Set him at liberty,' and actually add to their missive—'urgent.' You will own, my lord, 'tis enough to make a man at dinner shrug his shoulders!"

"What do you expect? It is for them to write," said Aramis, "for you to execute the order."

"Good! good! execute it! Oh, patience! You must not imagine that I am a slave."

"Gracious Heaven! my very good M. Baisemeaux, who ever said so? Your independence is well known."

"Thank Heaven!"

"But your goodness of heart is also known."

"Ah! don't speak of it!"

"And your obedience to your superior. Once a soldier, you see, Baisemeaux, always a soldier."

"And I shall strictly obey; and to-morrow morning, at daybreak, the prisoner referred to shall be set free."

"To-morrow?"

"At dawn."

"Why not this evening, seeing that the *lettre de cachet* bears, both on the direction and inside, '*urgent!*'"

"Because this evening we are at supper, and our affairs are urgent too!"

"Dear Baisemeaux, booted though I be, I feel myself a priest, and charity has higher claims upon me than hunger and thirst. This unfortunate man has suffered long enough, since you have just told me that he has been your prisoner these ten years. Abridge his suffering. His good time has come; give him the benefit quickly. God will repay you in Paradise with years of felicity."

"You wish it?"

"I entreat you."

"What! in the very middle of our repast?"

"I implore you; such an action is worth ten Benedicites."

"It shall be as you desire, only our supper will get cold."

"Oh! never heed that."

Baisemeaux leaned back to ring for François, and by a very natural motion turned round towards the door. The order had remained on the table; Aramis seized the opportunity when Baisemeaux was not looking to change the paper for another, folded in the same manner, which he drew swiftly from his pocket. "François," said the governor, "let the major come up here with the turnkeys of the Bertaudière." François bowed and quitted the room, leaving the two companions alone.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE GENERAL OF THE ORDER.

THERE was now a brief silence, during which Aramis never removed his eyes from Baisemeaux for a moment. The latter seemed only half decided to disturb himself thus in the middle of supper, and it was clear he was trying to invent some pretext, whether good or bad, for delay, at any rate till after dessert. And it appeared also that he had hit upon an excuse at last.

"Eh! but it is impossible!" he cried.

"How, impossible?" said Aramis. "Give me a glimpse of this impossibility."

"'Tis impossible to set a prisoner at liberty at such an hour. Where can he go to, a man so unacquainted with Paris?"

"He will find a place wherever he can."

"You see, now, one might as well set a blind man free!"

"I have a carriage, and will take him wherever he wishes."

"You have an answer for everything. François, tell

monsieur le major to go and open the cell of M. Seldon. No. 3, Bertaudière."

"Seldon!" exclaimed Aramis, very naturally. "You said Seldon, I think?"

"I said Seldon, of course. 'Tis the name of the man they set free."

"Oh! you mean to say Marchiali?" said Aramis.

"Marchiali? oh! yes, indeed. No, no, Seldon."

"I think you are making a mistake, Monsieur Baisemeaux."

"I have read the order."

"And I, also."

"And I saw 'Seldon' in letters as large as that," and Baisemeaux held up his finger.

"And I read 'Marchiali,' in characters as large as this," said Aramis, also holding up two fingers.

"To the proof; let us throw a light on the matter," said Baisemeaux, confident he was right. "There is the paper, you have only to read it."

"I read 'Marchiali,'" returned Aramis, spreading out the paper. "Look."

Baisemeaux looked, and his arms dropped suddenly. "Yes, yes," he said, quite overwhelmed; "yes, Marchiali. 'Tis plainly written Marchiali! Quite true!"

"Ah!——"

"How? the man of whom we have talked so much? The man whom they are every day telling me to take such care of?"

"There is 'Marchiali,'" repeated the inflexible Aramis.

"I must own it, monseigneur. But I understand nothing about it."

"You believe your eyes, at any rate."

"To tell me very plainly there is 'Marchiali."

"And in a good handwriting, too."

"'Tis a wonder! I still see this order and the name of

Seldon, Irishman. I see it. Ah! I even recollect that under this name there was a blot of ink."

"No, there is no ink; no, there is no blot."

"Oh! but there was, though; I know it, because I rubbed my finger—this very one—in the powder that was over the blot."

"In a word, be it how it may, dear M. Baisemeaux," said Aramis, "and whatever you may have seen, the order is signed to release Marchiali, blot or no blot."

"The order is signed to release Marchiali," replied Baisemeaux, mechanically, endeavoring to regain his courage.

"And you are going to release this prisoner. If your heart dictates to you to deliver Seldon also, I declare to you I will not oppose it the least in the world." Aramis accompanied this remark with a smile, the irony of which effectually dispelled Baisemeaux's confusion of mind, and restored his courage.

"Monseigneur," he said, "this Marchiali is the very same prisoner whom the other day a priest confessor of *our order* came to visit in so imperious and so secret a manner."

"I don't know that, monsieur," replied the bishop.

"'Tis no such long time ago, dear Monsieur d'Herblay."

"It is true. But *with us*, monsieur, it is good that the man of to-day should no longer know what the man of yesterday did."

"In any case," said Baisemeaux, "the visit of the Jesuit confessor must have given happiness to this man."

Aramis made no reply, but recommenced eating and drinking. As for Baisemeaux, no longer touching anything that was on the table, he again took up the order and examined it in every way. This investigation, under ordinary circumstances, would have made the ears of the impatient Aramis burn with anger; but the bishop of

Vannes did not become incensed for so little, above all, when he had murmured to himself that to do so was dangerous. Are you going to release Marchiali?" he said. "What mellow, fragrant and delicious sherry this is, my dear governor."

"Monseigneur," replied Baisemeaux, "I shall release the prisoner Marchiali when I have summoned the courier who brought the order, and above all, when, by interrogating him, I have satisfied myself."

"The order is sealed, and the courier is ignorant of the contents. What do you want to satisfy yourself about?"

"Be it so, monseigneur; but I shall send to the ministry, and M. de Lyonne will either confirm or withdraw the order."

"What is the good of all that?" asked Aramis, coldly.

"What good?"

"Yes; what is your object, I ask?"

"The object of never deceiving oneself, monseigneur; nor being wanting in the respect which a subaltern owes to his superior officers, nor infringing the duties of a service one has accepted of one's own free will."

"Very good; you have just spoken so eloquently, that I cannot but admire you. It is true that a subaltern owes respect to his superiors; he is guilty when he deceives himself, and he should be punished if he infringe either the duties or laws of his office."

Baisemeaux looked at the bishop with astonishment.

"It follows," pursued Aramis, "that you are going to ask advice, to put your conscience at ease in the matter?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"And if a superior officer gives you orders, you will obey?"

"Never doubt it, monseigneur."

"You know the king's signature well, M. de Baisemeaux?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Is it not on this order of release?"

"It is true, but it may——"

"Be forged, you mean?"

"That is evident, monseigneur."

"You are right. And that of M. de Lyonne?"

"I see it plain enough on the order; but for the same reason that the king's signature may have been forged, so also, and with even greater probability, may M. de Lyonne's."

"Your logic has the stride of a giant, M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis; "and your reasoning is irresistible. But on what special grounds do you base your idea that these signatures are false?"

"On this: the absence of counter-signatures. Nothing checks his majesty's signature; and M. de Lyonne is not there to tell me he has signed."

"Well, Monsieur de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, bending an eagle glance on the governor, "I adopt so frankly your doubts, and your mode of clearing them up, that I will take a pen, if you will give me one."

Baisemeaux gave him a pen.

"And a sheet of white paper," added Aramis.

Baisemeaux handed him some paper.

"Now, I—I, also—I, here present—incontestably, I—am going to write an order to which I am certain you will give credence, incredulous as you are!"

Baisemeaux turned pale at this icy assurance of manner. It seemed to him that that voice of the bishop's, but just now so playful and so gay, had become funereal and sad; that the wax lights changed into the tapers of a mortuary chapel, the very glasses of wine into chalices of blood.

Aramis took a pen and wrote. Baisemeaux, in terror, read over his shoulder.

"A. M. D. G." wrote the bishop; and he drew a cross under these four letters, which signify *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, "to the greater glory of God;" and thus he continued, "It is our pleasure that the order brought to M. de Baisemeaux de Montlezun, governor, for the king, of the castle of the Bastile, be held by him good and effectual, and be immediately carried into operation. (Signed) D'Herblay, "General of the Order, by the grace of God."

Baisemeaux was so profoundly astonished, that his features remained contracted, his lips parted, and his eyes fixed. He did not move an inch, nor articulate a sound. Nothing could be heard in that large chamber but the wing-whisper of a little moth, which was fluttering to its death about the candles. Aramis, without even deigning to look at the man whom he had reduced to so miserable a condition, drew from his pocket a small case of black wax; he sealed the letter, and stamped it with a seal suspended at his breast, beneath his doublet, and when the operation was concluded, presented—still in silence—the missive to M. de Baisemeaux. The latter, whose hands trembled in a manner to excite pity, turned a dull and meaningless gaze upon the letter. A last gleam of feeling played over his features, and he fell, as if thunderstruck, on a chair.

"Come, come," said Aramis, after a long silence, during which the governor of the Bastile had slowly recovered his senses, "do not lead me to believe, dear Baisemeaux, that the presence of the general of the Order is as terrible as His, and that men die merely from having seen Him. Take courage, rouse yourself; give me your hand—obey."

Baisemeaux, reassured, if not satisfied, obeyed, kissed Aramis's hand, and rose. "Immediately?" he murmured.

"Oh, there is no pressing haste, my host; take your place again, and do the honors over this beautiful dessert."

"Monseigneur, I shall never recover such a shock as

this; I who have laughed, who have jested with you! I who have dared to treat you on a footing of equality!"

"Say nothing about it, old comrade," replied the bishop, who perceived how strained the cord was, and how dangerous it would have been to break it; "say nothing about it. Let us each live in our own way; to you, my protection and my friendship; to me, your obedience. Having exactly fulfilled these two requirements, let us live happily."

Baisemeaux reflected; he perceived, at a glance, the consequence of this withdrawal of a prisoner by means of a forged order; and, putting in the scale the guarantee offered him by the official order of the general, did not consider it of any value.

Aramis divined this. "My dear Baisemeaux," said he, "you are a simpleton. Lose this habit of reflection when I give myself the trouble to think for you."

And at another gesture he made, Baisemeaux bowed again. "How shall I set about it?" he said.

"What is the process for releasing a prisoner?"

"I have the regulations."

"Well, then, follow the regulations, my friend."

"I go with my major to the prisoner's room, and conduct him, if he is a personage of importance."

"But this Marchiali is not an important personage," said Aramis carelessly.

"I don't know," answered the governor; as if he would have said, "It is for you to instruct me."

"Then if you don't know it, I am right; so act towards Marchiali as you act towards one of obscure station."

"Good; the regulations so provide. They are to the effect, that the turnkey, or one of the lower officials, shall bring the prisoner before the governor, in the office."

"Well, 'tis very wise, that; and then?"

"Then we return to the prisoner the valuables he wore

at the time of his imprisonment, his clothes and papers, if the minister's orders have not otherwise directed."

"What was the minister's order as to this Marchiali?"

"Nothing; for the unhappy man arrived here without jewels, without papers, and almost without clothes."

"See how simple, then, all is. Indeed, Baisemeaux, you make a mountain of everything. Remain here, and make them bring the prisoner to the governor's house."

Baisemeaux obeyed. He summoned his lieutenant, and gave him an order, which the latter passed on, without disturbing himself about it, to the next whom it concerned.

Half an hour afterwards they heard a gate shut in the court; it was the door to the dungeon, which had just rendered up its prey to the free air. Aramis blew out all the candles which lighted the room but one, which he left burning behind the door. This flickering glare prevented the sight from resting steadily on any object. It multiplied tenfold the changing forms and shadows of the place, by its wavering uncertainty. Steps drew near.

"Go and meet your men," said Aramis to Baisemeaux.

The governor obeyed. The sergeant and turnkeys disappeared. Baisemeaux re-entered, followed by a prisoner. Aramis had placed himself in the shade; he saw without being seen. Baisemeaux, in an agitated tone of voice, made the young man acquainted with the order which set him at liberty. The prisoner listened, without making a single gesture or saying a word.

"You will swear" ('tis the regulation that requires it) added the governor, "never to reveal anything that you have seen or heard in the Bastile."

The prisoner perceived a crucifix; he stretched out his hands, and swore with his lips. "And now, monsieur, you are free. Whither do you intend going?"

The prisoner turned his head, as if looking behind him

for some protection, on which he ought to rely. Then was it that Aramis came out of the shade: "I am here," he said, "to render the gentleman whatever service he may please to ask."

The prisoner slightly reddened, and without hesitation passed his arm through that of Aramis. "God have you in his holy keeping," he said, in a voice the firmness of which made the governor tremble as much as the form of the blessing astonished him.

Aramis on shaking hands with Baisemeaux, said to him: "Does my order trouble you? Do you fear their finding it here, should they come to search?"

"I desire to keep it, monseigneur," said Baisemeaux. "If they found it here, it would be a certain indication I should be lost, and in that case you would be a powerful and a last auxiliary for me."

"Being your accomplice, you mean?" answered Aramis, shrugging his shoulders. "Adieu, Baisemeaux," said he.

The horses were in waiting, making each rusty spring reverberate the carriage again with their impatience. Baisemeaux accompanied the bishop to the bottom of the steps. Aramis caused his companion to mount before him, then followed, and without giving the driver any further order, "Go on," said he. The carriage rattled over the pavement of the courtyard. An officer with a torch went before the horses, and gave orders at every post to let them pass. During the time taken in opening all the barriers, Aramis barely breathed, and you might have heard his "sealed heart knock against his ribs." The prisoner, buried in a corner of the carriage, made no more sign of life than his companion. At length, a jolt more severe than the others announced to them that they had cleared the last watercourse. Behind the carriage closed the last gate, that in the Rue St. Antoine. No more

walls either on the right or left; heaven everywhere, liberty everywhere, and life everywhere. The horses, kept in check by a vigorous hand, went quietly as far as the middle of the faubourg. There they began to trot. Little by little, whether they were warming to their work, or whether they were urged, they gained in swiftness, and once passed Bercy, the carriage seemed to fly, so great was the ardor of the coursers. The horses galloped thus as far as Villeneuve St. George's, where relays were waiting. Then four instead of two whirled the carriage away in the direction of Melun, and pulled up for a moment in the middle of the forest of Senart. No doubt the order had been given the postilion beforehand, for Aramis had no occasion even to make a sign.

"What is the matter?" asked the prisoner, as if waking from a long dream.

"The matter is, monseigneur," said Aramis, "that before going further, it is necessary your royal highness and I should converse."

"I will await an opportunity, monsieur," answered the young prince.

"We could not have a better, monseigneur. We are in the middle of a forest, and no one can hear us."

"The postilion?"

"The postilion of this relay is deaf and dumb, monseigneur."

"I am at your service, M. d'Herblay."

"Is it your pleasure to remain in the carriage?"

"Yes, we are comfortably seated, and I like this carriage; for it has restored me to liberty."

"Wait, monseigneur; there is yet a precaution to be taken."

"What?"

"We are here on the highway; cavaliers or carriages travelling like ourselves might pass, and seeing us stop-

ping, deem us in some difficulty. Let us avoid offers of assistance, which would embarrass us."

"Give the postilion orders to conceal the carriage in one of the side avenues."

"'Tis exactly what I wished to do, monseigneur."

Aramis made a sign to the deaf and dumb driver of the carriage, whom he touched on the arm. The latter dismounted, took the leaders by the bridle, and led them over the velvet sward and the mossy grass of a winding alley, at the bottom of which, on this moonless night, the deep shades formed a curtain blacker than ink. This done, the man lay down on a slope near his horses, who, on either side, kept nibbling the young oak shoots.

"I am listening," said the young prince to Aramis; "but what are you doing there?"

"I am disarming myself of my pistols, of which we have no further need, monseigneur."

CHAPTER LIV.

THE TEMPTER.

"My prince," said Aramis, turning in the carriage towards his companion, "weak creature as I am, so unpretending in genius, so low in the scale of intelligent beings, it has never yet happened to me to converse with a man without penetrating his thoughts through that living mask which has been thrown over our mind, in order to retain its expression. But to-night, in this darkness, in the reserve which you maintain, I can read nothing on your features, and something tells me that I shall have great difficulty in wresting from you a sincere declaration. I beseech you, then, not for love of me, for subjects should

never weigh as anything in the balance which princes hold, but for love of yourself, to retain every syllable, every inflexion which, under the present most grave circumstances, will all have a sense and value as important as any ever uttered in the world."

"I listen," repeated the young prince, "decidedly, without either eagerly seeking or fearing anything you are about to say to me." And he buried himself still deeper in the thick cushions of the carriage, trying to deprive his companion not only of the sight of him, but even of the very idea of his presence.

Black was the darkness which fell wide and dense from the summits of the intertwining trees. The carriage, covered in by this prodigious roof, would not have received a particle of light, not even if a ray could have struggled through the wreaths of mist that were already rising in the avenue.

"Monseigneur," resumed Aramis, "you know the history of the government which to-day controls France. The king issued from an infancy imprisoned like yours, obscure as yours, and confined as yours; only, instead of ending, like yourself, this slavery in a prison, this obscurity in solitude, these straitened circumstances in concealment, he was fain to bear all these miseries, humiliations, and distresses, in full daylight, under the pitiless sun of royalty; on an elevation flooded with light, where every stain appears a blemish, every glory a stain. The king has suffered; it rankles in his mind; and he will avenge himself. He will be a bad king. I say not that he will pour out his people's blood, like Louis XI., or Charles IX.; for he has no mortal injuries to avenge; but he will devour the means and substance of his people; for he has himself undergone wrongs in his own interest and money. In the first place, then, I acquit my conscience, when I consider openly the merits and the faults

of this great prince; and if I condemn him, my conscience absolves me."

Aramis paused. It was not to listen if the silence of the forest remained undisturbed, but it was to gather up his thoughts from the very bottom of his soul—to leave the thoughts he had uttered sufficient time to eat deeply into the mind of his companion.

"All that Heaven does, Heaven does well," continued the bishop of Vannes; "and I am so persuaded of it that I have long been thankful to have been chosen depositary of the secret which I have aided you to discover. To a just Providence was necessary an instrument, at once penetrating, persevering, and convinced, to accomplish a great work. I am this instrument. I possess penetration, perseverance, conviction; I govern a mysterious people, who has taken for its motto, the motto of God, '*Patiens quia æternus.*'" The prince moved. "I divine, monseigneur, why you are raising your head, and are surprised at the people I have under my command. You did not know you were dealing with a king—oh! monseigneur, king of a people very humble, much disinherited; humble, because they have no force save when creeping; disinherited, because never, almost never in this world, do my people reap the harvest they sow, nor eat the fruit they cultivate. They labor for an abstract idea; they heap together all the atoms of their power, to form a single man; and round this man, with the sweat of their labor, they create a misty halo, which his genius shall, in turn, render a glory gilded with the rays of all the crowns in Christendom. Such is the man you have beside you, monseigneur. It is to tell you that he has drawn you from the abyss for a great purpose, and that he desires, for this sublime purpose, to raise you above the powers of the earth—above himself."

The prince lightly touched Aramis's arm. "You speak

to me," he said, "of that religious order whose chief you are. For me, the result of your words is, that the day you desire to hurl down the man you shall have raised, the event will be accomplished; and that you will keep under your hand your creation of yesterday."

"Undeceive yourself, monseigneur," replied the bishop. "I should not take the trouble to play this terrible game with your royal highness, if I had not a double interest in gaining it. The day you are elevated, you are elevated forever; you will overturn the footstool, as you rise, and will send it rolling so far, that not even the sight of it will ever again recall to you its right to simple gratitude."

"Oh, monsieur!"

"Your movement, monseigneur, arises from an excellent disposition. I thank you. Be well assured, I aspire to more than gratitude! I am convinced that, when arrived at the summit, you will judge me still more worthy to be your friend; and then, monseigneur, we two will do such great deeds, that ages hereafter shall long speak of them."

"Tell me plainly, monsieur—tell me without disguise—what I am to-day, and what you aim at my being to-morrow."

"You are the son of King Louis XIII., brother of Louis XIV., natural and legitimate heir to the throne of France. In keeping you near him, as Monsieur has been kept—Monsieur your younger brother—the king reserved to himself the right of being legitimate sovereign. The doctors only could dispute his legitimacy. But the doctors always prefer the king who is to the king who is not. Providence has willed that you should be persecuted; this persecution to-day consecrates you king of France. You had then a right to reign, seeing that it is disputed; you had a right to be proclaimed seeing that you have been concealed; and you possess royal blood, since no one

has dared to shed yours, as that of your servants' has been shed. Now see, then, what this Providence, which you have so often accused of having in every way thwarted you, has done for you. It has given you the features, figure, age, and voice of your brother; and the very causes of your persecution are about to become those of your triumphant restoration. To-morrow, after to-morrow—from the very first, regal phantom, living shade of Louis XIV., you will sit upon his throne, whence the will of Heaven, confided in execution to the arm of man, will have hurled him, without hope of return."

"I understand," said the prince, "my brother's blood will not be shed, then."

"You will be sole arbiter of his fate."

"The secret of which they made an evil use against me?"

"You will employ against him. What did he do to conceal it? He concealed you. Living image of himself, you will defeat the conspiracy of Mazarin and Anne of Austria. You, my prince, will have the same interest in concealing him, who will, as a prisoner, resemble you, as you will resemble him as king."

"I fall back on what I was saying to you? Who will guard him?"

"Who guarded *you?*"

"You know this secret—you have made use of it with regard to myself. Who else knows it?"

"The queen-mother and Madame de Chevreuse."

"What will they do?"

"Nothing, if you choose."

"How is that?"

"How can they recognize you, if you act in such a manner that no one can recognize you?"

"'Tis true; but there are grave difficulties."

"State them, prince."

"My brother is married; I cannot take my brother's wife."

"I will cause Spain to consent to a divorce; it is in the interest of your new policy; it is human morality. All that is really noble and really useful in this world will find its account therein."

"The imprisoned king will speak."

"To whom do you think he will speak—to the walls?"

"You mean, by walls, the men in whom you put confidence."

"If need be, yes. And besides, your royal highness——"

"Besides?"

"I was going to say, that the designs of Providence do not stop on such a fair road. Every scheme of this caliber is completed by its results, like a geometrical calculation. The king, in prison, will not be for you the cause of embarrassment that you have been for the king enthroned. His soul is naturally proud and impatient; it is, moreover, disarmed and enfeebled, by being accustomed to honors, and by the license of supreme power. The same Providence which has willed that the concluding step in the geometrical calculation I have had the honor of describing to your royal highness should be your accession to the throne, and the destruction of him who is hurtful to you, has also determined that the conquered one shall soon end both his own and your sufferings. Therefore, his soul and body have been adapted for but a brief agony. Put into prison as a private individual, left alone with your doubts, deprived of everything, you have exhibited the most sublime, enduring principle of life in withstanding all this. But your brother, a captive, forgotten, and in bonds, will not long endure the calamity; and Heaven will resume his soul at the appointed time—that is to say, *soon*."

At this point in Aramis's gloomy analysis, a bird of

night uttered from the depths of the forest that prolonged and plaintive cry which makes every creature tremble.

"I will exile the deposed king," said Philippe, shuddering; "'twill be more human."

"The king's good pleasure will decide the point," said Aramis. "But has the problem been well put? Have I brought out the solution according to the wishes or the foresight of your royal highness?"

"Yes, monsieur, yes; you have forgotten nothing—except, indeed, two things."

"The first?"

"Let us speak of it at once, with the same frankness we have already conversed in. Let us speak of the causes which may bring about the ruin of all the hopes we have conceived. Let us speak of the risks we are running."

"They would be immense, infinite, terrific, insurmountable, if, as I have said, all things did not concur to render them of absolutely no account. There is no danger either for you or for me, if the constancy and intrepidity of your royal highness are equal to that perfection of resemblance to your brother which nature has bestowed upon you. I repeat it, there are no dangers, only obstacles; a word, indeed, which I find in all languages, but have always ill-understood, and, were I king, would have obliterated as useless and absurd."

"Yes, indeed, monsieur; there is a very serious obstacle, an insurmountable danger, which you are forgetting."

"Ah!" said Aramis.

"There is conscience, which cries aloud; remorse, that never dies."

"True, true," said the bishop; "there is a weakness of heart of which you remind me. You are right, too, for that indeed is an immense obstacle. The horse afraid of the ditch, leaps into the middle of it, and is killed! The

man who tremblingly crosses his sword with that of another leaves loopholes whereby his enemy has him in his power."

"Have you a brother?" said the young man to Aramis.

"I am alone in the world," said the latter, with a hard, dry voice.

"But, surely, there is some one in the world whom you love?" added Philippe.

"No one!—Yes, I love you."

The young man sank into so profound a silence, that the mere sound of his respiration seemed like a roaring tumult for Aramis. "Monseigneur," he resumed, "I have not said all I had to say to your royal highness; I have not offered you all the salutary counsels and useful resources which I have at my disposal. It is useless to flash bright visions before the eyes of one who seeks and loves darkness: useless, too, is it to let the magnificence of the cannon's roar make itself heard in the ears of one who loves repose and the quiet of the country. Monseigneur, I have your happiness spread out before me in my thoughts; listen to my words; precious they indeed are, in their import and their sense, for you who look with such tender regard upon the bright heavens, the verdant meadows, the pure air. I know a country instinct with delights of every kind, an unknown paradise, a secluded corner of the world—where alone, unfettered and unknown, in the thick covert of the woods, amidst flowers, and streams of rippling water, you will forget all the misery that human folly has so recently allotted you. Oh! listen to me, my prince. I do not jest. I have a heart, and mind, and soul, and can read your own,—aye even to its depths. I will not take you unready for your task, in order to cast you into the crucible of my own desires, of my caprice, or my ambition. Let it be all or nothing. You are chilled and galled, sick at heart, overcome by excess of the emo-

tions which but one hour's liberty has produced in you. For me, that is a certain and unmistakable sign that you do not wish to continue at liberty. Would you prefer a more humble life, a life more suited to your strength? Heaven is my witness, that I wish your happiness to be the result of the trial to which I have exposed you."

"Speak, speak," said the prince, with a vivacity which did not escape Aramis.

"I know," resumed the prelate, "in the Bas-Poitou, a canton, of which no one in France suspects the existence. Twenty leagues of country is immense, is it not? Twenty leagues, monseigneur, all covered with water and herbage, and reeds of the most luxuriant nature; the whole studded with islands covered with woods of the densest foliage. These large marshes, covered with reeds as with a thick mantle, sleep silently and calmly beneath the sun's soft and genial rays. A few fishermen with their families indolently pass their lives away there, with their great living-rafts of poplar and alder, the flooring formed of reeds, and the roof woven out of thick rushes. These barks, these floating-houses, are wafted to and fro by the changing winds. Whenever they touch a bank, it is but by chance; and so gently, too, that the sleeping fisherman is not awakened by the shock. Should he wish to land, it is merely because he has seen a large flight of landrails or plovers, of wild ducks, teal, widgeon, or woodcocks, which fall an easy prey to net or gun. Silver shad, eels, greedy pike, red and gray mullet, swim in shoals into his nets; he has but to choose the finest and largest, and return the others to the waters. Never yet has the foot of the stranger, be he soldier or simple citizen, never has any one, indeed, penetrated into that district. The sun's rays there are soft and tempered: in plots of solid earth, whose soil is swart and fertile, grows the vine, nourishing with generous juice its purple, white and golden grapes. Once

a week, a boat is sent to deliver the bread which has been baked at an oven—the common property of all. There—like the seigneurs of early days—powerful in virtue of your dogs, your fishing-lines, your guns, and your beautiful reed-built house, would you live, rich in the produce of the chase, in plenitude of absolute security. There would years of your life roll away, at the end of which, no longer recognizable, for you would have been perfectly transformed, you would have succeeded in acquiring a destiny accorded to you by Heaven. There are a thousand pistoles in this bag, monseigneur—more, far more, than sufficient to purchase the whole marsh of which I have spoken; more than enough to live there as many years as you have days to live; more than enough to constitute you the richest, the freest, and the happiest man in the country. Accept it, as I offer it you—sincerely, cheerfully. Forthwith, without a moment's pause, I will unharness two of my horses, which are attached to the carriage yonder, and they, accompanied by my servant—my deaf and dumb attendant—shall conduct you—traveling throughout the night, sleeping during the day—to the locality I have described; and I shall, at least, have the satisfaction of knowing that I have rendered to my prince the major service he himself preferred. I shall have made one human being happy; and Heaven for that will hold me in better account than if I had made one man powerful; the former task is far more difficult. And now, monseigneur, your answer to this proposition? Here is the money. Nay, do not hesitate. At Poitou, you can risk nothing, except the chance of catching the fevers prevalent there; and even of them, the so-called wizards of the country will cure you, for the sake of your pistoles. If you play the other game, you run the chance of being assassinated on a throne, strangled in a prison-cell. Upon my soul, I assure you, now I begin to compare them

together, I myself should hesitate which lot I should accept."

"Monsieur," replied the young prince, "before I determine, let me alight from this carriage, walk on the ground, and consult that still voice within me, which Heaven bids us all to hearken to. Ten minutes is all I ask, and then you shall have your answer."

"As you please, monsieur," said Aramis, bending before him with respect; so solemn and august in tone and address had sounded these strange words.

CHAPTER LV.

CROWN AND TIARA.

Aramis was the first to descend from the carriage; he held the door open for the young man. He saw him place his foot on the mossy ground with a trembling of the whole body, and walk round the carriage with an unsteady and almost tottering step. It seemed as if the poor prisoner was unaccustomed to walk on God's earth. It was the 15th of August, about eleven o'clock at night; thick clouds, portending tempest, overspread the heavens, and shrouded every light and prospect underneath their heavy folds. The extremities of the avenues were imperceptibly detached from the copse, by a lighter shadow of opaque gray, which, upon closer examination, became visible in the midst of the obscurity. But the fragrance which ascended from the grass, fresher and more penetrating than that which exhaled from the trees around him; the warm and balmy air which enveloped him for the first time for many years past; the ineffable enjoyment of liberty in an open country, spoke to the prince in so seductive a lan-



THIS SUSPENSE LASTED THE WHOLE TEN MINUTES

mis, overwhelmed by anxiety, contemplated with emotion the painful struggle that was taking place in Philippe's mind. This suspense lasted the whole ten minutes which the young man had requested. During this space of time, which appeared an eternity, Philippe continued gazing with an imploring and sorrowful look towards the heavens; Aramis did not remove the piercing glance he had fixed on Philippe. Suddenly the young man bowed his head. His thoughts returned to the earth, his looks perceptibly hardened, his brow contracted, his mouth assuming an expression of undaunted courage; again his looks became fixed, but this time they wore a worldly expression, hardened by covetousness, pride, and strong desire. Aramis's look immediately became as soft as it had before been gloomy. Philippe, seizing his hand in a quick, agitated manner, exclaimed:

"Lead me to where the crown of France is to be found."

"Is this your decision, monseigneur?" asked Aramis.

"It is."

"Irrevocably so?"

Philippe did not even deign to reply. He gazed earnestly at the bishop, as if to ask him if it were possible for a man to waver after having once made up his mind.

"Such looks are flashes of the hidden fire that betrays men's characters," said Aramis, bowing over Philippe's hand; "you will be great, monseigneur, I will answer for that."

"Let us resume our conversation. I wished to discuss two points with you, in the first place, the dangers or the obstacles we may meet with. That point is decided. The other is the conditions you intend imposing on me. It is your turn to speak, M. d'Herblay."

"The conditions, monseigneur?"

"Doubtless. You will not allow so mere a trifle to stop

me, and you will not do me the injustice to suppose that I think you have no interest in this affair. Therefore, without subterfuge or hesitation, tell me the truth."

"I will do so, monseigneur. Once a king——"

"When will that be?"

"To-morrow evening—I mean in the night."

"Explain yourself."

"When I shall have asked your highness a question."

"Do so."

"I sent to your highness a man in my confidence, with instructions to deliver some closely-written notes, carefully drawn up, which will thoroughly acquaint your highness with the different persons who compose and will compose your court."

"I perused these notes."

"Attentively?"

"I know them by heart."

"And understand them? Pardon me, but I may venture to ask that question of a poor, abandoned captive of the Bastile? In a week's time it will not be requisite to further question a mind like yours. You will then be in full possession of liberty and power."

"Interrogate me, then, and I will be a scholar repeating his lesson to his master."

"We will begin with your family, monseigneur."

"My mother, Anne of Austria! all her sorrows, her painful malady. Oh! I know her—I know her."

"Your second brother?" asked Aramis, bowing.

"To these notes," replied the prince, "you have added portraits so faithfully painted, that I am able to recognize the persons whose characters, manners, and history, you have so carefully portrayed. Monsieur, my brother is a fine dark young man, with a pale face; he does not love his wife, Henrietta, whom I, Louis XIV., loved a little, and still flirt with, even although she made me

weep on the day she wished to dismiss Mademoiselle de la Vallière from her service in disgrace."

"You will have to be careful with regard to the watchfulness of the latter," said Aramis; "she is sincerely attached to the actual king. The eyes of a woman who loves are not easily deceived."

"She is fair, has blue eyes, whose affectionate gaze reveal her identity. She halts slightly in her gait; she writes a letter every day, to which I have to send an answer by M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Do you know the latter?"

"As if I saw him, and I know the last verses he composed for me, as well as those I composed in answer to his

"Very good. Do you know your ministers?"

"Colbert, an ugly, dark-browed man, but intelligent enough, his hair covering his forehead, a large, heavy, full head; the mortal enemy of M. Fouquet."

"As for the latter, we need not disturb ourselves about him."

"No; because necessarily you will require me to exile him, I suppose?"

Aramis, struck with admiration at the remark, said, "You will become very great, monseigneur.'

"You see," added the prince, "that I know my lesson by heart, and with Heaven's assistance, and yours afterwards, I shall seldom go wrong."

"You have still an awkward pair of eyes to deal with, monseigneur."

"Yes, the captain of the musketeers, M. d'Artagnan, your friend."

"Yes; I can well say 'my friend.'"

"He who escorted La Vallière to Le Chaillot; he who delivered up Monk, cooped in an iron box, to Charles II., he who so faithfully served my mother; he to whom the

crown of France owes so much that it owes everything. Do you intend to ask me to exile him also?"

"Never, sire. D'Artagnan is a man to whom, at a certain given time, I will undertake to reveal everything; but be on your guard with him; for if he discovers our plot before it is revealed to him, you or I will certainly be killed or taken. He is a bold and enterprising man."

"I will think over it. Now tell me about M. Fouquet; what do you wish to be done with regard to him?"

"One moment more, I entreat you, monseigneur; and forgive me, if I seem to fail in respect in questioning you further."

"It is your duty to do so, nay, more than that, your right."

"Before we pass to M. Fouquet, I should very much regret forgetting another friend of mine."

"M. du Vallon, the Hercules of France, you mean; oh! as far as he is concerned, his interests are more than safe."

"No; it is not he whom I intended to refer to."

"The Comte de la Fère, then?"

"And his son, the son of all four of us."

"That poor boy who is dying of love for La Vallière, whom my brother so disloyally bereft him of? Be easy on that score. I shall know how to rehabilitate his happiness. Tell me only one thing, Monsieur d'Herblay; do men, when they love, forget the treachery that has been shown them? Can a man ever forgive the woman who has betrayed him? Is that a French custom, or is it one of the laws of the human heart?"

"A man who loves deeply, as deeply as Raoul loves Mademoiselle de la Vallière, finishes by forgetting the fault or crime of the woman he loves; but I do not yet know whether Raoul will be able to forget."

"I will see after that. Have you anything further to say about your friend?"

"No; that is all."

"Well, then, now for M. Fouquet. What do you wish me to do for him?"

"To keep him on as surintendant, in the capacity in which he has hitherto acted, I entreat you."

"Be it so; but he is the first minister at present."

"Not quite so."

"A king, ignorant and embarrassed as I shall be, will, as a matter of course, require a first minister of state."

"Your majesty will require a friend."

"I have only one, and that is yourself."

"You will have many others by and by, but none so devoted, none so zealous for your glory."

"You shall be my first minister of state."

"Not immediately, monseigneur, for that would give rise to too much suspicion and astonishment."

"M. de Richelieu, the first minister of my grandmother, Marie de Medici, was simply bishop of Lucon, as you are bishop of Vannes."

"I perceive that your royal highness has studied my notes to great advantage; your amazing perspicacity overpowers me with delight."

"I am perfectly aware that M. de Richelieu, by means of the queen's protection, soon became cardinal."

"It would be better," said Aramis, bowing, "that I should not be appointed first minister until your royal highness has procured my nomination as cardinal."

"You shall be nominated before two months are past, Monsieur d'Herblay. But that is a matter of very trifling moment; you would not offend me if you were to ask more than that, and you would cause me serious regret if you were to limit yourself to that."

"In that case I have something still further to hope for, monseigneur."

"Speak! speak!"

"M. Fouquet will not keep long at the head of affairs, he will soon get old. He is fond of pleasure, consistently, I mean, with all his labors, thanks to the youthfulness he still retains; but this protracted youth will disappear at the approach of the first serious annoyance, or at the first illness he may experience. We will spare him the annoyance, because he is an agreeable and noble-hearted man; but we cannot save him from ill-health. So it is determined. When you shall have paid all M. Fouquet's debts, and restored the finances to a sound condition, M. Fouquet will be able to remain the sovereign ruler in his little court of poets and painters,—we shall have made him rich. When that has been done, and I have become your royal highness's prime minister, I shall be able to think of my own interests and yours."

The young man looked at his interrogator.

"M. de Richelieu, of whom we were speaking just now, was very much to blame in the fixed idea he had of governing France alone, unaided. He allowed two kings, King Louis XIII. and himself, to be seated on the selfsame throne, whilst he might have installed them more conveniently upon two separate and distinct thrones."

"Upon two thrones?" said the young man, thoughtfully.

"In fact," pursued Aramis, quietly, "a cardinal, prime minister of France, assisted by the favor and by the countenance of his Most Christian Majesty the King of France, a cardinal to whom the king his master lends the treasures of the state, his army, his counsel, such a man would be acting with twofold injustice in applying these mighty resources to France alone. Besides," added Aramis, "you will not be a king such as your father was; delicate in health, slow in judgment, whom all things wearied; you will be a king governing by your brain and by your sword; you will have in the government of the state no

more than you will be able to manage unaided; I should only interfere with you. Besides, our friendship ought never to be, I do not say impaired, but in any degree affected, by a secret thought. I shall have given you the throne of France, you will confer on me the throne of St. Peter. Whenever your loyal, firm, and mailed hand shall have joined in ties of intimate association the hand of a pope such as I shall be, neither Charles the Fifth, who owned two-thirds of the habitable globe, nor Charlemagne, who possessed it entirely, will be able to reach to half your stature. I have no alliances, I have no predilections; I will not throw you into persecutions of heretics, nor will I cast you into the troubled waters of family dissension; I will simply say to you: The whole universe is our own; for me the minds of men, for you their bodies. And as I shall be the first to die, you will have my inheritance. What do you say of my plan, monseigneur?"

"I say that you render me happy and proud, for no other reason than that of having comprehended you thoroughly. Monsieur d'Herblay, you shall be cardinal, and when cardinal, my prime minister; and then you will point out to me the necessary steps to be taken to secure your election as pope, and I will take them. You can ask what guarantees from me you please."

"It is useless. Never shall I act except in such a manner that you will be the gainer; I shall never ascend the ladder of fortune, fame, or position, until I have first seen you placed upon the round of the ladder immediately above me; I shall always hold myself sufficiently aloof from you to escape incurring your jealousy, sufficiently near to sustain your personal advantage and to watch over your friendship. All the contracts in the world are easily violated because the interest included in them incline more to one side than to another. With us,

however, this will never be the case; I have no need of any guarantees."

"And so—my dear brother—will disappear?"

"Simply. We will remove him from his bed by means of a plank which yields to the pressure of the finger. Having retired to rest a crowned sovereign, he will awake a captive. Alone you will rule from that moment, and you will have no interest dearer and better than that of keeping me near you."

"I believe it. There is my hand on it, Monsieur d'Herblay."

"Allow me to kneel before you, sire, most respectfully. We will embrace each other on the day we shall have upon our temples, you the crown, I the tiara."

"Still embrace me this very day also, and be, for and toward me, more than great, more than skillful, more than sublime in genius; be kind and indulgent—be my father?"

Aramis was almost overcome as he listened to his voice; he fancied he detected in his own heart an emotion hitherto unknown; but this impression was speedily removed. "His father!" he thought; "yes, his Holy Father."

And they resumed their places in the carriage, which sped rapidly along the road leading to Vaux-le-Vicomte.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE CHÂTEAU DE VAUX-LE-VICOMTE.

The château of Vaux-le-Vicomte, situated about a league from Melun, had been built by Fouquet in 1655, at a time when there was a scarcity of money in France; Mazarin

had taken all that there was, and Fouquet expended the remainder. However, as certain men have fertile, false, and useful vices, Fouquet, in scattering broadcast millions of money in the construction of this palace, had found a means of gathering, as the result of his generous profusion, three illustrious men together: Levan, the architect of the building; Lenôtre, the designer of the gardens; and Lebrun, the decorator of the apartments. If the Château de Vaux possessed a single fault with which it could be reproached, it was its grand, pretentious character. It is even at the present day proverbial to calculate the number of acres of roofing, the restoration of which would, in our age, be the ruin of fortunes cramped and narrowed as the epoch itself. Vaux-le-Vicomte, when its magnificent gates, supported by caryatides, have been passed through, has the principal front of the main building opening upon a vast, so-called, court of honor, inclosed by deep ditches, bordered by a magnificent stone balustrade. Nothing could be more noble in appearance than the central forecourt raised upon the flight of steps, like a king upon his throne, having around it four pavilions at the angles, the immense Ionic columns of which rose majestically the whole height of the building. The friezes ornamented with arabesques, and the pediments which crowned the pilasters, conferred richness and grace on every part of the building, while the domes which surmounted the whole added proportion and majesty. This mansion, built by a subject, bore a far greater resemblance to those royal residences which Wolsey fancied he was called upon to construct, in order to present them to his master from the fear of rendering him jealous. But if magnificence and splendor were displayed in any one particular part of this palace more than in another,—if anything could be preferred to the wonderful arrangement of the interior, to the sumptu-

ousness of the gilding, and to the profusion of the paintings and statues, it would be the park and gardens of Vaux. The *jets d'eau*, which were regarded as wonderful in 1653, are still so, even at the present time; the cascades awakened the admiration of kings and princes; and as for the famous grotto, the theme of so many poetical effusions, the residence of that illustrious nymph of Vaux, whom Pélisson made converse with La Fontaine, we must be spared the description of all its beauties. We will do as Despréaux did,—we will enter the park, the trees of which are of eight years' growth only, that is to say, in their present position—and whose summits even yet, as they proudly tower aloft, blushingly unfold their leaves to the earliest rays of the rising sun. Lenôtre had hastened the pleasure of the Mecænas of his period; all the nursery-grounds had furnished trees whose growth had been accelerated by careful culture and the richest plant-food. Every tree in the neighborhood which presented a fair appearance of beauty or stature, had been taken up by its roots and transplanted to the park. Fouquet could well afford to purchase trees to ornament his park, since he had bought up three villages and their appurtenances (to use a legal word) to increase its extent. M. de Scudéry said of this palace, that, for the purpose of keeping the grounds and gardens well watered, M. Fouquet had divided a river into a thousand fountains, and gathered the waters of a thousand fountains into torrents. This same Monsieur de Scudéry said a great many other things in his "Clélie," about this palace of Valterre, the charms of which he describes most minutely. We should be far wiser to send our curious readers to Vaux to judge for themselves, than to refer them to Clélie;" and yet there are as many leagues from Paris to Vaux, as there are volumes of the "Clélie."

This magnificent palace had been got ready for the reception of the greatest reigning sovereign of the time. M. Fouquet's friends had transported thither, some their actors and their dresses, others their troops of sculptors and artists; not forgetting others with their ready-mended pens,—floods of impromptus were contemplated. The cascades, somewhat rebellious, nymphs though they were, poured forth their waters brighter and clearer than crystal: they scattered over the bronze triton and nereids their waves of foam, which glistened like fire in the rays of the sun. An army of servants were hurrying to and fro in squadrons in the courtyard and corridors; while Fouquet, who had only that morning arrived, walked all through the palace with a calm, observant glance, in order to give his last orders, after his intendants had inspected everything.

It was, as we have said, the 15th of August. The sun poured down its burning rays upon the heathen deities of marble and bronze: it raised the temperature of the water in the conch shells, and ripened, on the walls, those magnificent peaches, of which the king, fifty years later, spoke so regretfully, when, at Marly, on an occasion of a scarcity of the finer sorts of peaches being complained of, in the beautiful gardens there—gardens which had cost France double the amount that had been expended on Vaux—the *great king* observed to some one. "You are far too young to have eaten any of M. Fouquet's peaches."

Oh! fame! Oh! blazon of renown! Oh! glory of this earth! That very man whose judgment was so sound and accurate where merit was concerned—he who had swept into his coffers the inheritance of Nicholas Fouquet, who had robbed him of Lenôtre and Lebrun, and had sent him to rot for the remainder of his life in one of the state prisons—merely remembered the peaches of that vanquished, crushed, forgotten enemy! It was to little

purpose that Fouquet had squandered thirty millions of francs in the fountains of his gardens, in the crucibles of his sculptors, in the writing-desks of his literary friends, in the portfolios of his painters; vainly had he fancied that thereby he might be remembered. A peach—a blushing, rich-flavored fruit, nestling in the trellis work on the garden-wall, hidden beneath its long, green leaves, —this little vegetable production, that a dormouse would nibble up without a thought, was sufficient to recall to the memory of this great monarch the mournful shade of the last surintendant of France.

With a perfect reliance that Aramis had made arrangements fairly to distribute the vast number of guests throughout the palace, and that he had not omitted to attend to any of the internal regulations for their comfort, Fouquet devoted his entire attention to the *ensemble* alone. In one direction Gourville showed him the preparations which had been made for the fireworks; in another, Molière led him over the theater; at last, after he had visited the chapel, the *salons*, and the galleries, and was again going downstairs, exhausted with fatigue, Fouquet saw Aramis on the staircase. The prelate beckoned to him. The surintendant joined his friend, and, with him, paused before a large picture scarcely finished. Applying himself, heart and soul, to his work, the painter Lebrun, covered with perspiration, stained with paint, pale from fatigue and the inspiration of genius, was putting the last finishing touches with his rapid brush. It was the portrait of the king, whom they were expecting, dressed in the court suit which Percerin had condescended to show beforehand to the bishop of Vannes. Fouquet placed himself before this portrait, which seemed to live, as one might say, in the cool freshness of its flesh, and in its warmth of color. He gazed upon it long and fixedly, estimated the prodigious labor that had been bestowed

upon it, and, not being able to find any recompense sufficiently great for this Herculean effort, he passed his arm round the painter's neck and embraced him. The surintendant, by this action, had utterly ruined a suit of clothes worth a thousand pistoles, but he had satisfied, more than satisfied, Lebrun. It was a happy moment for the artist; it was an unhappy one for M. Percerin, who was walking behind Fouquet, and was engaged in admiring, in Lebrun's painting, the suit that he had made for his majesty, a perfect *objet d'art*, as he called it, which was not to be matched except in the wardrobe of the surintendant. His distress and his exclamations were interrupted by a signal which had been given from the summit of the mansion. In the direction of Melun, in the still empty, open plain, the sentinels of Vaux had just perceived the advancing procession of the king and the queens. His majesty was entering Melun with his long train of carriages and cavaliers.

"In an hour——" said Aramis to Fouquet.

"In an hour!" replied the latter, sighing.

"And the people who ask one another what is the good of these royal *fêtes!*" continued the bishop of Vannes, laughing, with his false smile.

"Alas! I, too, who am not the people, ask myself the same thing."

"I will answer you in four-and-twenty hours, monseigneur. Assume a cheerful countenance, for it should be a day of true rejoicing."

"Well, believe me or not, as you like, D'Herblay," said the surintendant, with a swelling heart, pointing at the *cortège* of Louis, visible in the horizon, "he certainly loves me but very little, and I do not care much more for him; but I cannot tell you how it is, that since he is approaching my house——"

"Well, what?"

"Well, since I know he is on his way here, as my guest, he is more sacred than ever for me; he is my acknowledged sovereign, and as such is very dear to me."

"Dear? yes," said Aramis, playing upon the word, as the Abbé Terray did, at a later period, with Louis XV.

"Do not laugh, D'Herblay; I feel that if he really seemed to wish it, I could love that young man."

"You should not say that to me," returned Aramis, "but rather to M. Colbert!"

"To M. Colbert!" exclaimed Fouquet. "Why so?"

"Because he would allow you a pension out of the king's privy purse, as soon as he becomes surintendant," said Aramis, preparing to leave as soon as he had dealt this last blow.

"Where are you going?" returned Fouquet, with a gloomy look.

"To my own apartment, in order to change my costume, monseigneur."

"Whereabouts are you lodging, D'Herblay?"

"In the blue room on the second story."

"The room immediately over the king's room?"

"Precisely."

"You will be subject to very great restraint there. What an idea to condemn yourself to a room where you cannot stir or move about!"

"During the night, monseigneur, I sleep or read in my bed."

"And your servants?"

"I have but one attendant with me. I find my reader quite sufficient. Adieu, monseigneur; do not overfatigue yourself; keep yourself fresh for the arrival of the king."

"We shall see you by and by, I suppose, and shall see your friend Du Vallon also?"

"He is lodging next to me, and is at this moment dressing."

And Fouquet, bowing, with a smile, passed on like a commander-in-chief who pays the different outposts a visit after the enemy has been signaled in sight.

END OF VOL. IV.